

Copyright © 2022 Warren Bradley Wetherell

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH
CHRIST AT THE ORCHARD IN ARLINGTON
HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Warren Bradley Wetherell
May 2022

APPROVAL SHEET

TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH
CHRIST AT THE ORCHARD IN ARLINGTON
HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

Warren Bradley Wetherell

Read and Approved by:

Robert L. Plummer (Faculty Supervisor)

Dean Clark

Date _____

I dedicate this project to my wife, Kristen, with whom I am joyfully united in this life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale.....	3
Purpose	5
Goals.....	6
Research Methodology.....	6
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	8
Conclusion.....	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH CHRIST AT THE ORCHARD IN ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS	11
An Overview of Romans 5:12–21	12
Solidarity with Adam	12
Solidarity with Christ.....	14
The Domain of Sin.....	15
The Domain of Grace.....	16
Summary	16
An Overview of Romans 6.....	17
Romans 6:1–4	17
Romans 6:5–11	21

Chapter	Page
Romans 6:12–14	24
Romans 6:15–19	27
Romans 6:20–23	30
Summary.....	33
3. HISTORICAL AND HOMILETICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH CHRIST: THE PREACHING OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES	35
The Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones.....	36
Romans 5:12–21	38
Romans 6:1–4	44
Romans 6:5–11	48
Romans 6:12–14	52
Romans 6:15–19	55
Romans 6:20–23	58
Conclusion.....	62
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT	63
Preparation.....	63
Implementation.....	67
The Sermon Series	67
The Life Group Study	68
Content Overview.....	70
The Sermon Series	70
The Life Group Study	76
5. PROJECT EVALUATION.....	79
Introduction	79
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	79
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals.....	80

	Page
Assess the Current Understanding	80
Develop a Sermon Series	81
Develop a Life Group Curriculum	82
Increase Understanding	83
Strengths of the Project	84
Weaknesses of the Project	87
What I Would Do Differently.....	89
Theological Reflections.....	90
Personal Reflections	94
Conclusion.....	95
 Appendix	
1. UNION WITH CHRIST ASSESSMENT	96
2. SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC.....	100
3. LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC.....	102
4. PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY	104
5. SERMON SERIES	109
6. LIFE GROUP STUDY	195
BIBLIOGRAPHY	284

PREFACE

My heart is full of gratitude as I submit this project. My church, The Orchard, provided generous support and encouragement as I pursued this degree. It is a joy to pastor people who are so hungry to learn God's Word. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was an excellent context in which to do this work, and I appreciated all the faculty I had the privilege of learning from. I am particularly thankful for the wise counsel and encouragement Dr. Plummer gave me while supervising this project. I am also indebted to my brother Davis for all his skillful and professional editing.

I am deeply grateful for my family. Kristen graciously released me to travel for courses and spurred me on along the way. Joanna demonstrated a lot of patience when Daddy was working in our home office, and her interruptions were the best study breaks. John was born in the middle of this project, providing some much-needed baby cuteness to brighten the challenging days of 2020. It would have been impossible to pursue this degree without my family's wonderful love and support.

Finally, and most of all, I am eternally grateful to Jesus Christ, who is my life. "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3:8).

Brad Wetherell

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Grant Macaskill calls union with Christ “the most appropriate description of the theology of the New Testament.”¹ God’s work to bring his people into a living union with Jesus Christ lies at the heart of Christian truth and teaching. Throughout the Scriptures, this union is described in striking terms. Jesus says his followers are connected to him like branches on a vine (John 15:1–11). Paul proclaims that believers have participated in Christ’s death, resurrection, and newness of life (Rom 6:4). Peter describes the church as a new temple being constructed with Christ as the cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4–7). Believers who comprehend these truths find strength for fighting sin, motivation for pursuing holiness, and a key to enjoying God in the Christian life. However, many Christians have never heard a clear definition of the doctrine of union with Christ, and many of those who have heard of this doctrine still wrestle to apply it in their personal lives. Therefore, the goal of this project was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Context

The Orchard is a multi-site church located in the greater Chicago area, which was gathering about three thousand worshippers across six campuses each weekend prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.² This project took place at The Orchard’s Arlington Heights Campus. The Orchard’s mission is to glorify God by multiplying God-centered, Christ-

¹ Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

² The Orchard belongs to the Evangelical Free Church of America.

exalting, world-transforming believers through the gospel in the greater Chicago area and around the world.³ The Orchard's deep conviction is that the Bible presents one unified story centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27). The gospel is not only the message at the heart of this story, it is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).⁴ Therefore, The Orchard proclaims the gospel to unbelievers so that they might repent and trust in Christ, and to believers so that they might grow in their walk with Christ.

At The Orchard, the gospel is announced every Sunday in worship services. Then, throughout the week, members remind one another of the gospel in Life Groups and seek bear fruit for God's glory in grateful response to the gospel. The Orchard has worked hard to help its members know, believe, and love the gospel. Still, there is more work to do, and there are a few areas in which The Orchard will benefit from continued teaching and encouragement.

First, members of The Orchard need to grow in their understanding of how the gospel affects the Christian life. Some members at The Orchard have a truncated understanding of the gospel message reduced merely to the doctrine of justification. The Orchard proudly celebrates its Reformed Protestant heritage and rightly emphasizes the doctrine of justification taught by the reformers in the sixteenth century. However, justification is not the only aspect of God's work for his people in Christ. God does not merely declare believers righteous; he also gives them a new life with a new power for pursuing godliness. Regeneration and sanctification are gospel doctrines as well, and they each have massive implications for Christian living. A gospel message which limits God's work in Christ to justification alone is incomplete. The Orchard does not teach this

³ This mission statement was approved by the church's membership in 2010.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this paper will come from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

incomplete message, but members at The Orchard often articulate the gospel simply as the truth that “Jesus died to forgive sins.” Therefore, The Orchard would benefit from more teaching on the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification.

That leads to a second area in which members at The Orchard need increased knowledge of the gospel. Many members of The Orchard have an incomplete or even inaccurate understanding of the Christian’s new life and the way sanctification works. For example, some members lay far too much emphasis on God’s role in the process, as if growing in holiness required nothing more than yielding to his work. This perspective is sometimes expressed in the popular mantra “let go and let God.” This is a mistake, and it lends itself toward laziness and even licentiousness. Other members of The Orchard lean too far in the opposite direction and view sanctification as a task entirely laid upon their own shoulders. “God forgives,” they believe, “but the rest is up to us.” This mistake lends itself toward a kind of legalism in which Christians set out to follow God by their own strength, often ending up in prideful self-righteousness or defeated despair.

These common experiences demonstrate a significant opportunity for The Orchard to continue nourishing its members with the truths of the gospel. Members at The Orchard need to comprehend and celebrate that they are justified and that they are being sanctified. They need to see both what God declares about them and how God is at work in them. They need to see that they have a new nature, that they live by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that they are destined for glory. All of this gospel truth is bound up in one crucial, but often neglected, doctrine: the believer’s union with Christ. Few members at The Orchard understand what this union means both theologically and practically. Therefore, this project sought to help believers at The Orchard understand and live in light of the sin-defeating, holiness-producing, doctrine of union with Christ.

Rationale

Kevin DeYoung writes, “Union with Christ may be the most important

doctrine [Christians have] never heard of.”⁵ This is true for many members at The Orchard. Members of The Orchard love Jesus, his gospel, and his Word, but lack clarity regarding one of Scripture’s central teachings. As Sinclair Ferguson points out, “The overwhelmingly dominant way the New Testament describes believers . . . is that we are ‘in Christ.’ The expression, in one form or another, occurs well over one hundred times in Paul’s thirteen letters.”⁶ Therefore, Ferguson goes on to argue, “If this is not the overwhelmingly dominant way in which we think about ourselves, we are not thinking with the renewed mind of the gospel.”⁷ Many members at The Orchard do not primarily think of themselves as being “in Christ,” and this project aimed to change that.

Understanding and applying the doctrine of union with Christ benefits members at The Orchard in several ways. First, defining the common expression “in Christ” helps believers understand their Bibles better. Many readers struggle to define this frequently occurring phrase in Paul’s writing. In the same way, many Christians struggle to grasp the meaning of common union images in the New Testament (e.g. the body in 1 Cor 12:27–31, the temple in 1 Cor 6:19–20, the branches of the vine in John 15, and death and resurrection in Rom 6). Therefore, defining and explaining the doctrine of union with Christ helps believers understand their Bibles more comprehensively.

Second, teaching on union with Christ helps believers grasp the relationship between justification and sanctification. Again, many believers in the Reformed tradition seem to have far more clarity regarding the nature of God’s justifying work than they do regarding God’s sanctifying work. Christians fall into the mistakes of viewing sanctification as either a passive process or something left entirely to human will and

⁵ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 94.

⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 45.

⁷ Ferguson, *Whole Christ*, 45.

effort. Understanding the transforming nature of union with Christ will give Christians clarity and confidence in their pursuit of Christlikeness (Phil 2:12–13).

Third, believers with more clarity and confidence regarding God’s means of making his people more like Jesus demonstrate greater resolve and hope in the battle against sin (Rom 6). Many Christians live with a sense of defeat in the fight against sin and temptation. They feel like failures, unable to conquer their besetting vices, and wonder if the struggle is even worth the effort. Grasping the nature of union with Christ encourages Christians with the possibility and the promise that they can in fact make progress in this fight.

Fourth, the truth of union with Christ not only motivates believers to rid themselves of sin, but also encourages them to pursue holiness. Too many followers of Jesus live with the misconceived notion that holiness is some foreign quality only available to an elite class of Christians. The doctrine of union with Christ reveals that God has made his people holy and that his children have the joy of growing into this new holy life he has given to them (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore, one of the great joys of the Christian life is living the new life of holiness now, while anticipating the day when that life will be perfected forever.

Finally, along those lines, teaching the doctrine of union with Christ helps believers grow in assurance. The Bible is clear that those whom God justifies he sanctifies, and those whom he sanctifies he glorifies (Rom 8:30). Many Christians wrestle with assurance of salvation. The more believers can grasp that those whom God unites to his Son will never be cast away, the more their assurance increases. Christians need to know nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:31–39).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Goals

The following four goals were created to determine whether or not this project accomplished the stated purpose. In order to teach union with Christ effectively, it was important to discover what members at The Orchard knew about the doctrine and then to build upon that understanding. Finally, an assessment at the conclusion of the project determined how effective the teaching was in the life of the church.

1. Assess the current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard.
2. Develop a six-week sermon series on the doctrine of union with Christ.
3. Develop a six-session Life Group curriculum that allowed participants to explore and apply the doctrine of union with Christ.
4. Increase the understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard.

Research Methodology

Four goals guided the implementation of this project.⁸ The first goal was to assess the current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard. This goal was measured by administering the Union with Christ Assessment (UCA) to a minimum of twenty-five members.⁹ This goal was considered successfully met when twenty-five members complete the UCA and the results were analyzed. This information served as a valuable basis for the teaching involved in the remainder of the project.

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on the doctrine of union with Christ as Paul defines and explains it in Romans 5:12–6:23. This goal was measured by an expert panel of preaching pastors from inside and outside The Orchard who used the Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric (SSER) to evaluate the biblical

⁸ All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

⁹ See appendix 1.

faithfulness, theological precision, clarity of communication, and overall effectiveness of the sermon series.¹⁰ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceed the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to develop a six-session Life Group curriculum that allowed participants to explore and apply the doctrine of union with Christ as Paul explains it in Romans 5:12–6:23. This curriculum built upon the content of the six-week sermon series. However, the curriculum also served as a stand-alone study which Life Groups can use independent of the sermon series. This goal was measured by an expert panel of pastors from inside and outside The Orchard who utilized the Life Group Curriculum Evaluation Rubric (LGCER) to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, theological engagement, and overall effectiveness of the curriculum.¹¹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceed the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The fourth goal was to increase the understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members of The Orchard. This goal was measured by the pre-project and post-project survey administered for both the sermon series and the Life Group study which was used to measure the change in doctrinal knowledge.¹² The survey was completed by 34 people before and after the sermon series, and then 15 people before and after the Life Group study. Their results were analyzed using the Survey Results

¹⁰ See appendix 2.

¹¹ See appendix 3.

¹² See appendix 4.

Rubric.¹³ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre-project and post-project survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are important for the reader to know since they were used in the ministry project:

Union with Christ. Union with Christ is a large theological category which takes on different nuances depending on the particular passage of Scripture under consideration. As a foundation, this project initially used Constantine Campbell's broad definition:

A believer is united to Christ at the moment of coming to faith; their union is established by the indwelling of the Spirit. The person united to Christ therefore enters into participation with Christ in his death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. As a participant in Christ's death and resurrection, the believer dies to the world and is identified with the realm of Christ. As a member of the realm of Christ, the believer is incorporated into his body, since union with Christ entails union with his members.¹⁴

However, during the preparation of this project, the following definition was developed to articulate the doctrine clearly and concisely: Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

Life Groups. A Life Group is a small group at The Orchard. While Life Groups at The Orchard vary in size and demographics, there are a few defining elements to a Life Group. Each group spends time at each meeting in fellowship around the Word, intercessory prayer, and encouragement under the guidance of a trained leader.

Four limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the UCA was

¹³ See appendix 4.

¹⁴ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 414.

dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. To mitigate this limitation, the UCA did not require that participants include their names. Second, the length of the sermon series was ultimately determined by the elders of The Orchard since they create the preaching calendar and assign preaching opportunities each year. To mitigate this limitation, I requested that the elders assign me a six-week preaching block during the necessary time frame for the project implementation. Third, the accuracy of the pre-project and post-project survey was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents be honest about their understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. To mitigate this limitation, the pre-project and post-project survey did not require that participants include their names, but asked them to provide the last four digits of their social security number so that their answers could be compared accurately. Fourth, attendance at the sermons and the Life Group sessions was dependent on the participants.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, while the Life Group curriculum could extend beyond the time frame of the sermon series, this project limited the curriculum's length to match the sermon series. This allowed the Life Group participants to engage with the same material taught in the sermon series. Second, the project was confined to a forty-three-week time frame. This gave adequate time to administer the initial UCA and evaluate the responses. Then, in light of the assessment, this time frame gave adequate time to prepare and preach the six-week sermon series and to prepare and lead the six-week Life Group study. Third, this project aimed to administer the pre-project survey and post-project survey to twenty-five members of The Orchard in advance of hearing the sermon series and another twenty-five members in advance of the Life Group.

Conclusion

The Christian life involves a living union with Jesus. Understanding this union

benefits believers immensely as they seek to understand the Bible, understand themselves, fight sin, grow in godliness, and rest confidently in God's saving grace. The following chapters define this doctrine biblically, show how this doctrine has benefitted the church historically, and demonstrate how this doctrine was taught at The Orchard. Chapter 2 focuses on the doctrine of union with Christ as Paul describes it in Romans 5:12-6:23.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH CHRIST AT THE ORCHARD IN ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

The thesis of this chapter is that understanding the doctrine of union with Christ will help Christians resist sin and pursue holiness. In order to prove this thesis, this chapter includes an overview of two key passages of Scripture: Romans 5:12–21 and Romans 6:1–23. There are certainly many other passages in the Bible that define the doctrine of union with Christ and describe its implications. In fact, John Murray writes, “Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”¹ The doctrine of union with Christ runs implicitly through the whole counsel of God’s Word. At the same time, there are certain places in the Bible where this doctrine appears explicitly, and Romans 5:12–6:23 is a primary example. In this section of Scripture, Paul describes the meaning and implications of a believer’s union with Christ, especially a believer’s union with Christ in death and resurrection (Rom 6:5). Paul’s goal is to encourage his readers with the work God has done on their behalf, a work that guarantees their justification, sanctification, and final glorification. God has united his people to his Son, Jesus Christ, and Paul knows that grasping the nature of this union will help believers resist sin and pursue holiness.

This project contains a preaching series and a small group study on Paul’s argument in Romans 5:12–6:23, encouraging believers at The Orchard with particular emphasis Paul places on the believer’s union with Christ in this passage. Therefore, this

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 171.

chapter provides the biblical and theological support for the project.

An Overview of Romans 5:12–21

Romans 5:12–21 provides an important foundation for interpreting and understanding Paul’s soteriology. This passage also sets the stage for everything that follows in Romans 6. Like a wide-angle lens, these verses capture the whole scope of human history and God’s work of redemption.² From this vantage point, readers see that every human being is living either in solidarity with Adam or in solidarity with Christ. Therefore, human beings are either living in the domain of sin or the domain of grace. Understanding these fundamental realities of human existence is crucial for properly understanding the doctrine of union with Christ.

Solidarity with Adam

In Romans 5:12–21 Paul teaches that all people either live in solidarity with Adam or with Christ, and each relationship results in entirely different experiences.³ In solidarity with Adam, humans stand condemned before God as sinners both in nature and in practice.

Humanity’s sinful nature is the direct result of Adam’s initial transgression against God’s authority. “Our nature,” Calvin says, “is vitiated in [Adam].”⁴ How did this happen? Paul writes, “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men” (Rom 5:12). Adam’s first sin, his initial rebellion against God’s rule, brought death to the entire human race. “Many died,” Paul writes, “through one man’s trespass” (Rom 5:15). Paul is saying that God created Adam as not only the

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 343.

³ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010), 201, Logos.

first human but also a representative human. By God's design Adam's actions impact everyone born after him, and therefore his sin has directly affected all of humanity. As Schreiner writes, "There is something prior to individual sin, something that undergirds and explains it: because of Adam's sin, human beings enter the world spiritually dead (and physical death will follow in due course). Human beings don't enter into the world in a neutral state. They are 'dead on arrival' because of Adam's sin."⁵

Spiritual death precedes the actual practice of sinning, and it explains why personal sins happen. Humans are born with a propensity to sin, and, as each person grows and matures, he or she acts upon this sin-bent disposition in a variety of ways. So, Paul can say, "Sin came into the world through one man, . . . and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Both aspects are true: Adam's sin led to the spiritual (and physical) death of all his descendants, and his descendants are also guilty of personal sins committed in their own lives. Again, Paul says, "By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19). So, in solidarity with Adam, humans are sinful beings. They do not become sinners because they sin; they sin because they are sinners.

Humanity's sinful nature and sinful practices both warrant God's just condemnation. Sin is an offense against his holiness and his righteous standards (Rom 3:23). So, Paul says, "The judgement following one trespass brought condemnation. . . . One trespass led to condemnation for all men." (Rom 5:16–18). This is a sweeping statement. All of humanity is caught up in the effects of Adam's initial transgression. This reality offends humanity's sense of autonomy, especially in our modern era which

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 289.

prizes individual freedom. Yet, as Schreiner says, “Paul doesn’t defend or apologize for such a notion. He simply asserts it.”⁶

Solidarity with Christ

Solidarity with Christ stands in stark contrast to solidarity with Adam. Paul says that Adam “was a type of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14). Just as God made Adam a representative of all humanity, he sent Jesus as another representative, one who completely transforms the identity of his people. “Like Adam,” Thielman writes, “Jesus Christ affected all humanity that came after him, but the difference between the two figures is . . . vast.”⁷ Paul summarizes the difference when he says, “As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom 5:18). The “one act of righteousness” is Paul’s way of describing Jesus’s saving work. It is not only his atoning death and victorious resurrection, but the entirety of his perfect obedience to the Father which sets Jesus in permanent contrast to Adam.⁸ This righteous act, in contrast with Adam’s transgression, leads to both justification and life for everyone who belongs to Christ. Christians are justified. The penalty for their sin was paid at the cross (Rom 3:25), and the perfect righteousness of Jesus was credited to their account (Rom 5:19), making their bond with God indestructible (Rom 8:1–39). Christians also enjoy fundamentally different lives. Instead of living with a fallen nature defined by spiritual death producing all kinds of sin, those in solidarity with Christ enjoy new spiritual life with a new ability to honor God in daily practice (Rom 6).

Human beings are divided between those in solidarity with Adam and those in solidarity with Christ. The former brings death and condemnation; the latter brings life

⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 290.

⁷ Frank Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 287.

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol 1, *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII* (New York: T&T Clark, 1975), 289.

and justification. Adam and Christ are representatives. They are also the founding figures of two vastly different domains of existence: the domain of sin and the domain of grace.

The Domain of Sin

In Romans 5:12–21, Paul describes sin not only in terms of Adam’s initial trespass and humanity’s subsequent rebellion but also as a reigning power exercising dominion over fallen humanity. Adam is the founding figure of this dark reality, the one who opened the door to sin’s domain, a door through which all of fallen humanity after him has walked.⁹ So, as a result of his trespass, fallen humans are not only sinful by nature and practice but also in bondage to sin’s dominating power.

Fallen human beings in solidarity with Adam are slaves under sin’s authority. Paul writes, “Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned though that one man” (Rom 5:17). Adam and his descendants were created to reign over God’s creation for God’s glory (Gen 1:28). “But,” Schreiner writes, “by virtue of [Adam’s] sin both he and all his descendants were alienated from God, and instead of Adam ruling the world, death ruled over him.”¹⁰ Verse 17 makes it sound as if death is the ultimate evil authority in the universe, but in verse 21 Paul says, “Sin reigned in death.” Cranfield argues that ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ probably means “with death as its result.”¹¹ Therefore, spiritual and physical death covers the creation as the result of sin’s reign. It is sin itself, personified in Romans 5, that holds all of humanity in its grip. Paul is describing sin as “an insidious power that, once allowed entry, multiplies until it dominates, enslaves, and kills everyone.”¹²

⁹ For Adam as the founding figure, see Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 26. Regarding Adam opening the door to sin’s domain, see Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 346.

¹⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 291.

¹¹ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 294.

¹² Thielman, *Romans*, 282.

The Domain of Grace

Just as Adam opened the door to the domain of sin, Christ opens the door to the domain of grace (Rom 5:21).¹³ In this new domain, sin no longer holds people in a slavery, and death is no longer their ultimate outcome. Instead, Christ sets his people free from sin's power, leading them into eternal life. In this new domain, Christ's people begin to experience God's original intention for humanity on the earth. They begin to "reign" in a way that was previously impossible while they lived in the domain of sin: Paul says, "Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness *reign* in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17; emphasis added). Cranfield comments,

The effectiveness and the unspeakable generosity of the divine grace are such that it will not merely bring about the replacement of the reign of death by the reign of life, but it will actually make those who receive its riches to become kings themselves, that is, to live "the true kingly life" purposed by God for man.¹⁴

In the domain of God's grace, established by the work of Christ, believers enjoy new freedom to resist sin's power and pursue holy lives. They are restored through God's redeeming grace, and they are destined for eternal life.

Summary

As shown by the above exposition of Romans 5:12–21, every human is in solidarity either with Adam or with Christ. With Adam, humans are sinners by nature and by practice, facing certain condemnation. With Christ, humans are justified and forgiven, experiencing the blessings of salvation. With Adam, humans live in the domain of sin, dominated by death. With Christ, humans live in the domain of grace, enjoying the gifts of freedom and life.¹⁵ How is one transferred from Adam to Christ, from sin to grace?

¹³ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 346.

¹⁴ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 288.

¹⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 524–25.

And what are the implications of this change? These are the questions Paul answers in Romans 6.

An Overview of Romans 6

After describing human history and God’s work of redemption from the broadest of perspectives in Romans 5:12–21, Paul now zooms in and focuses on individual Christian experience in Romans 6. This chapter describes how a person is transferred from solidarity with Adam to solidarity with Christ, from the domain of sin into the domain of grace. The first half of the chapter “focuses on the negative—release from sin,” while the second half of the chapter focuses “on the positive—dedication to righteousness.”¹⁶ Paul’s core argument in this chapter is identical to the thesis of this ministry project chapter: that understanding the doctrine of union with Christ will help Christians resist sin and pursue holiness. In order to explain his argument with sufficient detail, this paper will explore Romans 6 in five sections.

Romans 6:1–4

Romans 6:1–4 begins with a provocative question, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1). In other words, if the increase of sin in human history led to an abundant outpouring of grace in Jesus Christ, should believers just keep on sinning and living like agents of hell since their future in heaven is assured?¹⁷ It is important to remember that Paul has personified sin in Romans 5, describing it as a dark and dominating power, holding fallen humanity in bondage. As Moo says, sin is “a power or master that exercises unbreakable control over all who are ‘in Adam.’”¹⁸ Therefore, in his opening question, Paul is not simply asking if believers

¹⁶ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 377.

¹⁷ Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 185.

¹⁸ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 376.

should continue in their sinful practices. He is asking if believers should willfully live under the reign of sin's power, and his answer is an emphatic no (Rom 6:2). The reason for his strong rejection of this notion is profound. Johnson points out that,

In response to [the question of Rom 6:1], Paul does not say, "Do you not know that we owe God a debt of gratitude for the fact that he has justified us freely in Christ?" Neither does he say, "Do you not know that our justification produces in us the effect of sanctification?" No, Paul's answer stretches back to a more all-encompassing reality. . . . The questioner has not understood what it means to be united to Christ.¹⁹

Christians certainly feel a debt of gratitude for God's grace, and Paul will argue that justification always leads to sanctification, but it is the believer's union with Christ that takes center stage as the primary motivation for fighting sin and pursuing holiness in this chapter.

Paul begins this argument by describing the believer's death to sin, the breaking of solidarity with Adam and transfer out of sin's domain (Rom 6:2).²⁰ It is crucial to notice that Paul describes this break with sin in the indicative mood (οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ). This is not a command; it is an established fact that defines every Christian life. Schreiner rightly says, "He is not *exhorting* believers to cease from sin (a command in the imperative mood); he is *proclaiming* to them the good news that they have died to sin (a statement of fact in the indicative mood)."²¹

What does Paul mean when he says believers in Jesus have "died to sin" (Rom 6:2)? C. E. B. Cranfield helpfully outlines four different senses in which Christians die to sin.²² First, "they died to sin *in God's sight*, when Christ died on the cross for them."²³

¹⁹ Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 124.

²⁰ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 382. See also Thielman, *Romans*, 303.

²¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 308.

²² Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

²³ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

Cranfield calls this the judicial sense, referring to the way Jesus paid the penalty for sin and secured his people's release from condemnation. Second, Cranfield writes,

They died to sin, and were raised up, in their baptism, which was at the same time both their ratification of their own acceptance of God's decision on their behalf (to regard Christ's death for their sins as their death and His risen life as their life) and also God's bestowal of His seal and pledge of the fact that His decision really concerned them individually, personally.²⁴

Cranfield calls this the baptismal sense, which this paper will revisit in the next paragraph. Third, Cranfield says believers "are called, and have been given the freedom, to die daily and hourly to sin by the mortification of their sinful natures."²⁵ Cranfield calls this the moral sense, which Paul begins to emphasize in verse 12. Fourth, "they will die to sin finally and irreversibly—at Christ's coming."²⁶ Cranfield calls this the eschatological sense, the ultimate end for every person united to Christ. This is a compelling summary of what it means to die to sin, and Paul emphasizes each of the four senses throughout Romans 6. Paul wants Christians to understand that they have experienced a "once-for-all definitive breach with sin,"²⁷ and that they have been transferred into an entirely new realm of existence. This transfer is secured through Christ's work in the past, experienced by individual believers at baptism, applied throughout the Christian's life, and culminates at Christ's return.

It is Cranfield's "baptismal sense" that may be most easily confused by believers today. This language comes right from Romans 6:3 where Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" This is Paul's first clear reference to the doctrine of union with Christ in Romans 6, and he says this union is established at a believer's baptism. This does not mean that

²⁴ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

²⁵ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 300.

²⁶ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 300.

²⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:213.

union with Christ is itself effected through the act of baptism. Instead, Moo writes, “Baptism functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole.”²⁸ The New Testament simply does not have a category for unbaptized believers. Baptism is the first act of faith for new converts to Christianity, and Paul’s original readers would have understood his reference to baptism as a reference to conversion. Therefore, his point is that when a person believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, a faith that is expressed in the act of baptism, that person is united with Christ. As Vanhoozer puts it, “Baptism [Conversion] marks the moment in *our* history when we are incorporated into *Jesus’* history.”²⁹ Specifically, believers are incorporated into Jesus’s death and resurrection. Paul says, “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” (Rom 6:4). Believers in Jesus are no longer living in solidarity with Adam, held fast by the power of sin, and destined for death. They are now living in solidarity (union) with Christ, submitted to his Lordship, and destined for resurrection life. And this momentous transfer takes place in individual lives when they are converted to faith in Christ. Therefore, Christians cannot continue to live in sin. As Schreiner helpfully summarizes, “At baptism (i.e., conversion) the death of Christ becomes ours because we share the benefits of his death by virtue of our incorporation into him. Paul’s argument, then, is that grace cannot possibly lead believers to sin more because by dying with Christ the power of sin has been definitively broken.”³⁰

²⁸ Colin Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 260. See also Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 380; Thielman, *Romans*, 304.

²⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ’: The State of Union and the Place of Participation in Paul’s Discourse, New Testament Exegesis, and Systematic Theology Today,” in *In Christ in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 19.

³⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 312.

Romans 6:5–11

In this section of Romans 6, Paul continues to expand upon the meaning of the believer's union with Christ. He writes, "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" (Rom 6:5). Grudem argues this "death" means a diminished desire for sin, while subsequent life with Christ means an increasing desire for holiness.³¹ While a shift in heart-allegiance from sin to holiness is certainly an implication of Paul's point, he is actually saying much more than this.

Paul says believers have been "united with [Christ] in a death like his." Two key words help the reader understand the full meaning of this phrase. The first word is "united" (σύνουτοι). This word describes "an association in a related experience . . . *identified with.*"³² So, converts to Christianity now have an identity determined by the death of Christ. The second word is "like" (ὁμοιώματι). While the English word "like" can refer to any kind of similarity, Schreiner writes, "The word ὁμοίωμα signifies that the believer's death with Christ is a reality. We truly died with him."³³ "But," Schreiner continues, "the word also denotes that our death with him is 'like' his, not identical in every respect. We participated in his death, but our death is not analogous to his in every respect."³⁴ In what sense then is the believer's death "identified with" and "like" the death of Christ? Paul elaborates in the next verse. He says, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing" (Rom 6:6). The "old self" and the "body of sin" are two ways of describing the same reality:

³¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 842.

³² Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 960.

³³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 316.

³⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 316.

humanity's state in solidarity with Adam, in the domain of sin. Moo says, "the 'old man' is what we were 'in Adam'—the 'man' of the old age, who lives under the tyranny of sin and death."³⁵ This "old self" is not simply a part of a believer's former identity but "the whole of what we were prior to conversion, what we were in solidarity with Adam."³⁶ It is this "old self," Calvin says, which "is fastened to the cross of Christ, for by its power he is slain."³⁷ With this meaning in mind, Christians can truly say they have died with Christ. Their former lives, which were defined by solidarity with Adam and were in the domain of sin, are over. When Jesus died on the cross, that "old self," that "body of sin," was crucified with him. The death of the Son of God on the hill of Golgotha was a unique moment in space-time-history that will never be repeated. And yet, every time someone is converted to faith in Christ, he or she dies like Jesus died. As a result, Christians are "no longer . . . enslaved to sin" (Rom 6:6, cf. v. 7).

Instead, believers now live with Christ (Rom 6:8) because they are also "united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). At the cross Jesus willfully submitted himself to the powers of sin and death.³⁸ "He died to sin, once for all" (Rom 6:10). Schreiner writes, "He voluntarily experienced death as the consequence of sin in order to break sin's dominion."³⁹ Now, however, "he lives to God" (Rom 6:10). His resurrection demonstrates the defeat of sin's power (Rom 6:9). As Calvin says, "by submitting to its dominion, as it were, for a moment, [he] destroyed it forever."⁴⁰ And since believers are united with him, they are freed from sin's dominion as well. This is what Paul means

³⁵ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 398.

³⁶ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 263.

³⁷ Calvin, *Romans*, 224.

³⁸ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 402.

³⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 321.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Romans*, 227.

when he says that believers have died with Christ and risen with Christ. He is describing “a change of lordship as the believer dies to the dominion of sin and death and enters new life in the realm of Christ.”⁴¹ Before Christ, human existence is defined by solidarity with Adam and his transgression which dragged all people into the domain of sin and death. But now, the Christian’s existence is defined by solidarity with Christ and his death and resurrection which deliver all of his people from the domain of sin and transfer them into the domain of grace. This transfer occurs for individual believers at their conversion as he or she “enters the new dominion which is determined by Christ and his saving acts.”⁴² As Tannehill says, “In baptism the destruction of the old world and founding of the new which the cross brings about reaches its goal in the life of the individual.”⁴³

Paul concludes this section of deep theological truth with the first imperative in the book of Romans. He tells his readers that they “must consider [themselves] dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). Thielman summarizes the point of Paul’s command well:

Paul asks his readers to draw conclusions that do not at first seem obvious. They have not experienced physical death as Christ did; they do not have immortal bodies as Christ does; and they still experience the effects of the sinful world around them, including its deceptive appeal. Nevertheless, because they are “in Christ” they are now in the realm that he rules. Within this sphere, his death and resurrection have effectively atoned for their sin, reconciled them to God, and broken the power of sin (3:24–25; 5:1–6:11; cf. 8:1). They can only live in a way that is consistent with these truths if they “count” (λογίζεσθε) them as true for themselves (cf. 2 Cor 5:14–15).⁴⁴

Paul is telling these Christians that they must think hard about the doctrine of union with Christ and its affects upon their lives. He is calling his readers to meditate on these realities, because he knows it will help them resist sin and pursue holiness. As Kevin

⁴¹ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 352.

⁴² Tannehill, *Dying and Rising*, 42.

⁴³ Tannehill, *Dying and Rising*, 42.

⁴⁴ Thielman, *Romans*, 309.

DeYoung says, “Only by knowing our position *in* Jesus can we begin to live *like* Jesus.”⁴⁵ In the following sections, Paul will tell believers how to pursue this Christlike life in light of these wonderful truths.

Romans 6:12–14

In these verses Paul argues that the believer’s union with Christ provides both the means and the motivation for resisting sin. Christians once belonged to the domain of sin in solidarity with Adam, but they have now been transferred into the domain of grace in solidarity (union) with Christ. The old self, the body of sin, was crucified and buried with Christ, and now they enjoy a new life. God did all of this without the Christian’s involvement, but now Paul tells Christians how to apply this doctrine. He moves into a series of commands, but the facts he has just conveyed undergird everything he says. Paul never separates indicatives from imperatives. For him, the theological truth always supports the practical application. Ladd writes, “The old person—the old nature—the old self has been put to death . . . has been put off in principle; yet believers are exhorted to do in practice what has already been done in principle.”⁴⁶

Paul’s first command is that believers must refuse to let sin reign in their mortal bodies (Rom 6:12). Christians are called to live in light of the fact that they have been delivered from sin’s domain. Their position in Christ is fundamentally different than it was in solidarity with Adam, even if it does not always feel different. A Christian still lives in a “mortal body.” Moo writes, “The same body that has been severed from its servitude to sin (6:6) is nevertheless a body that still participates in the weakness, suffering, and dissolution of this age.”⁴⁷ Sin still remains present in the world and in the

⁴⁵ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 94.

⁴⁶ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 536.

⁴⁷ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 406.

Christian's life. "Nevertheless," Schreiner says, "since believers have died with Christ and have his resurrection power, they are enabled to have dominion over sin now, with the result that they do not submit to its desires."⁴⁸ Therefore, Christians must take active measures to resist the lingering presence of sin in their lives. This resistance is possible because they are no longer enslaved to sin. Christians have a new master.

In the domain of grace, the believer's new master is God himself. Therefore, they are not to offer their "members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but . . . to God as instruments for righteousness" (Rom 6:13).⁴⁹ By "members" (τὰ μέλη) Paul refers to all natural capacities, such as thoughts, desires, and deeds. These members are "instruments" (ὄπλα), a word often used in military metaphors and translated as "weapons" (e.g., 2 Cor 6:7).⁵⁰ Language of weaponry is consistent with the themes of power and dominion in Romans 6. As servants of God, believers are called to engage all their faculties in the war against sin. Calvin writes,

[Paul] now bids us to present ourselves wholly to God, so that restraining our minds and hearts from all wanderings into which the lusts of the flesh may draw us, we may regard the will of God alone, being ready to receive his commands, and prepared to execute his orders; and that our members also may be devoted and consecrated to his will, so that all the faculties both of our souls and of our bodies may aspire after nothing but his glory.⁵¹

This is a serious, all-encompassing command which should affect the entire Christian life and everything the believer does. Christians cannot continue in sin (Rom 6:1–2), because sin is the tyrannical enemy they are called to wage war against. Yet once again, the indicative truth of union with Christ undergirds this imperative. Paul tells his readers to wage this war against sin "as those who have been brought from death to life" (Rom 6:13). Moo says, "By characterizing those whom he commands 'as those alive from the

⁴⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 324.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Romans*, 231.

⁵⁰ Thielman, *Romans*, 311.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Romans*, 231.

dead,' Paul reminds us that this presenting of ourselves to God can take place only because of the new state we find ourselves in as a result of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection."⁵²

Paul concludes this section with a glorious promise. He says, "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom 6:14). According to Cranfield, Paul is promising his readers "that sin will no more be their lord, because another Lord has taken possession of them, namely, Christ."⁵³ He is reminding them again about their transfer out of the domain of sin and into the domain of grace. It is important to note that in this verse "law" is equated with sin. Paul is certainly not saying that the law itself is sinful, but he is referring to life in the "Mosaic era."⁵⁴ Schreiner comments that the age before Christ "was the age in which sin dominated."⁵⁵ Kruse writes, "What was impossible under the regiment of the Mosaic law (the fulfillment of the law's own demands) because of humanity's weakness is made possible under the new covenant because of the renewing and transforming power of the Spirit."⁵⁶ Christians are liberated from sin's tyranny, a power of darkness the law was unable to conquer. Now, in Christ, in the domain of grace, Christians are free to wage war against their former master with confidence and hope. As Horton writes, "Regardless of how far we fall short of acting on it, the fact of our indicative condition is that sin cannot dominate us; it has lost its claim, precisely because we are 'not under law but under grace.'"⁵⁷ Therefore, union with Christ provides both the means and the motivation for resisting sin.

⁵² Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 409.

⁵³ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 319.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 327.

⁵⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 327.

⁵⁶ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 269.

⁵⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 675.

Romans 6:15–19

In this section of Romans 6, Paul continues to unpack the same major themes of the chapter so far, putting a special emphasis on the pursuit of holiness in the Christian life. Just as understanding union with Christ helps believers fight sin, understanding this union also provides the means and motivation for pursuing holiness. Life in Christ is not only about putting off sin, but also putting on righteousness. Before diving into this theme, Paul rephrases his question from verse 1. He asks, If Christians are in the domain of grace, justified and set free from sin by no work of their own, is sinning permissible and acceptable in this new life (Rom 6:15)? Again, the answer is an emphatic no. To explain his reasoning this time, Paul uses the image of slavery.

“Do you not know,” he says, “that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom 6:16). Paul’s point is that every single person lives under the authority of a master, and there are only two options. A person can serve either sin or obedience (i.e., God). The possibility of living in total independence is not even presented as an option.⁵⁸ This means that unbelievers who consider themselves free because they do not submit to God’s commands are not free at all. It also means that believers who have been released from sin’s bondage are released not to unfettered autonomy but to obey the only righteous and good master. Moo writes, “The freedom of the Christian is not freedom to do what one wants, but freedom to obey God—willingly, joyfully, naturally.”⁵⁹ The effects of these two kinds of slavery are completely different. Slavery to sin leads to death, while slavery to God leads to righteousness. Why does Paul not say that slavery to God leads to life? Moo argues that Paul’s goal in this verse is not to present direct contrasts but to emphasize the importance

⁵⁸ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 323.

⁵⁹ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 425.

of moral righteousness, conduct pleasing to God, in the Christian life.⁶⁰ Anyone who is truly serving God will grow in righteousness.

Once again, the basis for this pursuit of holiness is not the believer's ability or commitment, but God's transforming work. After laying out the contrasting options of slavery, Paul writes, "Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin . . . have become slaves of righteousness" (Rom 6:17–18). Schreiner wisely points out, "The thanksgiving must not be passed over lightly; what must be observed is that *God* is the one who rescued them from sin's dominion. It is due to *his* work that they have become obedient from the heart to the gospel."⁶¹ This transfer from one master to another did not come about "through their own merit," Calvin says, "but through the special mercy of God."⁶²

As a result of God's mercy, his people have become "obedient from the heart" (Rom 6:17). This heart-level obedience is the fulfillment of one of God's key promises in the Old Testament.⁶³ He says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). As a result of God's transforming work in uniting the believer with Christ, the Christian's heart now willingly submits to God's authority. The Christian's heart is now committed to God's "standard of teaching" (Rom 6:17). The passive form of παραδίδομι communicates God's activity in this new commitment. As Moo says, "Paul wants to make clear that becoming a Christian means being placed under the authority of Christian 'teaching.' . . . The new convert's 'obedience' to this teaching is the outgrowth

⁶⁰ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 426.

⁶¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 333.

⁶² Calvin, *Romans*, 235–56.

⁶³ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 254.

of God's action in 'handing us over' to that teaching when we were converted."⁶⁴

Through his own gracious initiative and intervention, God has released his people from slavery to sin and made them slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:18).

Next, Paul pauses briefly to explain the limitations of this imagery in verse 19. "After all," Murray writes, "the new life in Christ is not 'slavery' as it exists among men; it is the highest and only freedom. But the institution of slavery does service to set forth the totality of our commitment to God in that emancipation from the bondage of sin which union with Christ involves."⁶⁵ Therefore, despite the paradox of the imagery, Paul's point still stands and the implication is clear. He says, "Just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification" (Rom 6:19). Again, the indicative leads to the imperative. Believers have been set free from slavery to sin and are now enslaved to God. Therefore, Paul commands them to live in light of this new position, committing themselves "as slaves to doing what is right before God ('righteousness')."⁶⁶ This new lifestyle will result in sanctification, "the process of becoming more and more holy."⁶⁷ "The noun *ἁγιασμός*," Cranfield writes, "occurs in the NT nine other times [Rom 6:22; 1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 2:15; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:2]. It denotes God's work in the believer, his ethical renewal."⁶⁸

Paul's point so far in this chapter is that the believer's union with Christ provides the means and the motivation for fighting sin and pursuing holiness. God has transferred his people from solidarity with Adam to solidarity with Christ, they are no

⁶⁴ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 427.

⁶⁵ Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 233.

⁶⁶ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 431.

⁶⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 337.

⁶⁸ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 327.

longer bound to the domain of sin but live in the domain of grace. This transformative work results in both the believer's justification and sanctification. As DeYoung writes, "Sanctification doesn't just flow from justification, so that one produces the other. Both come from the same Source. Christ justifies no one whom he does not also sanctify. By virtue of our union with Christ, he bestows both gifts, the one never without the other."⁶⁹ Connecting the doctrines of justification and sanctification under the banner of union with Christ prevents two errors. First, it eliminates the antinomian tendency to think that grace means God's people are free to live as they please. Believers in Christ are united to Christ, and this union necessitates holy living in service of God and his righteousness. Second, the doctrine of union with Christ eliminates the legalistic tendency to think that holiness is an independent personal pursuit. As former slaves to sin, released from this bondage by the sheer grace of God in Christ, believers never could have pursued his righteous ways apart from his intervening and ongoing grace.⁷⁰ As Ferguson aptly puts it, the "medicine" for both antinomianism and legalism is "understanding and tasting union with Jesus Christ."⁷¹

Romans 6:20–23

In these final verses of Romans 6, Paul continues to compare the reign of sin with the reign of grace. He describes the difference between these two domains in three ways.⁷² First, he contrasts the status of the unbeliever with the status of the believer. Second, he contrasts the resulting experience of these opposite positions. Third, he contrasts the ultimate outcome of each position. Each of these contrasting descriptions is

⁶⁹ DeYoung, *Hole in our Holiness*, 99.

⁷⁰ Allen, *Sanctification*, 186.

⁷¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 1.

⁷² These three descriptions come from Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 421.

important.

First, Paul contrasts the status of the unbeliever with the status of the believer. Continuing with his image of slavery and freedom he writes, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness” (Rom 6:20). Throughout this chapter, Paul has personified sin as a powerful master, holding all people in solidarity with Adam in bondage. The unbelieving world is not free; it is held fast by the power of sin. The only genuine freedom an unbeliever experiences is freedom from righteousness. Moo comments, “Non-Christians often pride themselves on possessing a freedom appropriate to autonomous human beings and deride Christians for giving that up—becoming subhuman—in obedience to a god. And Paul admits that those apart from Christ have a certain freedom. But it is a freedom ‘with respect to’ one thing only: ‘righteousness.’”⁷³

Before these Roman believers knew Christ, righteousness was not the governing authority of their lives. As Murray says, “They were carefree in respect of the demands of righteousness; with undivided heart and a single eye they were the bondservants of sin, and that was the only mastery they knew.”⁷⁴ When they became Christians, they were released from this slavery and enslaved to a new master: God (Rom 6:22). This is the first time in Romans 6 that Paul has specifically called God the great master over the believer’s life. But this is Paul’s meaning throughout all the preceding verses. Moo writes, “Behind believers’ subservience to ‘grace’ (vv. 14, 15), ‘obedience’ (v. 16), ‘pattern of teaching’ (v. 17), and ‘righteousness’ (vv. 18, 19), and embracing them all, is their ultimate allegiance to God.”⁷⁵ Therefore, there are only two possible options for human life: slavery to sin or slavery to God. The former defined the unbeliever, the latter defines the believer.

⁷³ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 431.

⁷⁴ Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 235.

⁷⁵ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 433.

Second, Paul contrasts the experiences that result from each status. Looking back on the Roman Christians' former lives in slavery to sin, Paul asks, "What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?" (Rom 6:21). Paul may be implying that the believers had no fruit in their lives, since fruit is almost always used in the New Testament to describe godly qualities.⁷⁶ Oppositely, Paul may be using "fruit" to describe general actions and characteristics present in the lives of unbelievers.⁷⁷ Either way, Paul says these Christians are now ashamed of the way they used to live. He himself understood this experience, often recounting the shameful practices that marked his own life before Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 15:9; 1 Tim 1:13; Titus 3:3).⁷⁸ But now, he says, the believer's slavery to God is producing something completely different: "Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification" (Rom 6:22). The Christian life is a harvest of holiness. Believers produce godly fruit in their lives because of God's own transforming work—a work that will culminate in the glories of everlasting life.

This is the final contrast of Romans 6: the different outcomes for those enslaved to sin and those enslaved to God. "The wages of sin," Paul writes, "is death" (Rom 6:23). Once again sin is personified as a master, paying out wages to his people. The image of wages may be taken from the Roman military, with generals who paid out wages to their soldiers.⁷⁹ Yet, Cranfield argues convincingly that the more likely meaning of "wages" is connected with the slavery imagery present throughout the previous verses.⁸⁰ Sin, as a cruel master, dishes out death as payment to all who are enslaved to

⁷⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 338.

⁷⁷ Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 432.

⁷⁸ Thielman, *Romans*, 324.

⁷⁹ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 329.

⁸⁰ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*.

him. Since death is contrasted with eternal life in this context, Paul is certainly referring to something more than physical death. “Death,” Murray writes, “can be nothing less than death in its most ultimate expression and, though not restricted to everlasting perdition, must nevertheless include it.”⁸¹ However, in glorious contrast, Paul says, “the free gift of God is eternal life” (Rom 6:23). Sinners earn the wages of death from their master, but believers receive the free gift of eternal life from God. Despite the cruel power of sin over the unbelieving world, Paul is clear that everyone in solidarity with Adam is a sinner by nature and in practice. Therefore, their outcome is what they deserve and is appropriately described as “wages.” However, Christians do not get what they deserve; they get grace. Cranfield writes, “God does not pay wages, since no man can put Him in his debt; but the free gift which He gives is nothing less than eternal life.”⁸² This is the Christian’s eternal confidence as he or she battles sin and pursues holiness.

Lastly, Paul says all of this belongs to those who are “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Schreiner writes, these words “indicate that God’s gift of eternal life is granted to those who are united with the Lord Jesus Christ, to those who were united in his death and resurrection.”⁸³ A believer’s union with Christ is an unbreakable bond that will culminate in eternal life.

Summary

Romans 5:12–6:23 is a key section of Scripture for understanding the doctrine of union with Christ. These verses demonstrate that every human being is either in solidarity with Adam or in solidarity with Christ. People are, therefore, living in either the domain of sin or the domain of grace (Rom 5:12–21). A believer comes into solidarity

⁸¹ Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, 236.

⁸² Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 330.

⁸³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 339.

with Christ and the domain of grace through union with Christ—a union that is established in an individual’s life at conversion (Rom 6:1–4). In union with Christ, believers have died to sin and risen to a new life (Rom 6:5–11). This is a fact that every Christian must consider regularly (Rom 6:11), because this truth provides the means and motivation for the call to resist sin (Rom 6:12–14) and pursue holiness (Rom 6:15–19) until this union culminates in eternal life (Rom 6:20–23). Therefore, the blessing of justification, the fruit of sanctification, and the free gift of eternal life are each guaranteed for every person living in union with Christ. This is a doctrine of crucial importance in the life of the church, and every believer will benefit from an increasing understanding of this truth. Understanding the doctrine of union with Christ will help Christians resist sin and pursue holiness.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND HOMILETICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH CHRIST: THE PREACHING OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

On Friday evenings from October 1957 to April 1959, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached a series of thirty-six expositional sermons on Romans 5:12–6:23 to his congregation at Westminster Chapel in London.¹ The series of messages came after several years of Lloyd-Jones’s own personal struggle with the text.² In 1943, a fellow preacher asked Lloyd-Jones, “When are you going to preach a series of expository sermons on the Epistle to the Romans?”³ Lloyd-Jones replied without hesitation, “When I have really understood chapter 6.”⁴ In 1954, while Lloyd-Jones was preaching on the topic of spiritual depression, he began to study Romans 6 again and “suddenly felt that [he] had arrived at a satisfactory understanding.”⁵ The personal impact on Lloyd-Jones himself was profound. Reflecting on his fresh grasp of the text, he says, “Personally, I found my new understanding of it to be one of the most liberating experiences in my Christian life.”⁶

The goal of this project was to help members at The Orchard experience the

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5; Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), xi. See also Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), xii.

² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xi.

³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xi.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xi.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xi.

⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xii.

same liberating truth Lloyd-Jones discovered in 1954 by teaching the doctrine of union with Christ. This project sought to help believers at The Orchard understand and live in light of the sin-defeating, holiness-producing doctrine that Christians are no longer in solidarity with Adam, but with Christ. In union with him, they are no longer slaves to sin, but to righteousness; they are no longer destined for death, but for eternal life.

While the doctrine of union with Christ is found throughout the Bible, this project involved a sermon series and a Life Group study on a particular biblical text: Romans 5:12–6:23. Chapter 2 provided the biblical and theological support for this project through an overview of Paul’s teaching in Romans 5:12–6:23. Chapter 3 explores the preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones as a historical and homiletic example. Lloyd-Jones’s preaching on Romans 5:12–6:23 demonstrates how this passage can help Christians understand and apply the doctrine of union with Christ. This chapter will summarize his exposition, which effectively shows how this doctrine should fill believers with confidence and joy in the fight against sin and in the pursuit of holiness. For clarity and consistency, this chapter follows the text divisions from chapter 2 and considers Lloyd-Jones’s explanation, illustration, and application of each passage.

The Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Lloyd-Jones was committed to proclaiming Christian doctrine in his preaching. In fact, he considered thoughtful theological engagement with the text essential for faithful preaching. “Preaching,” he writes, “must always be theological.”⁷ Lloyd-Jones instructed preachers to study diligently, in order to find the doctrine at the heart of each passage of Scripture, and then communicate that teaching clearly to the congregation.⁸ This emphasis on doctrinal depth and clarity of communication was a defining mark of

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 40th anni. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 75.

⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 86.

Lloyd-Jones's pulpit ministry. And yet, for Lloyd-Jones, preaching with doctrinal depth did not result in preaching that flew over the heads of the congregation. Iain Murray writes, "His preaching demanded thought on the part of the hearer, yet it was not preaching from which the more intelligent present could gain the most. He pitched the level of his argument and paced its development in a way which many children present could generally follow."⁹

Doctrine was essential in Lloyd-Jones's preaching. However, simply communicating doctrinal facts and information was never Lloyd-Jones's exclusive goal as he opened the Word for his church. He writes, "People do not come just as minds or as intellects, they come as total persons in the midst of life, with all its attendant circumstances and its problems, and its difficulties and its trials; and the business of the preacher is not only to remember that but to preach accordingly."¹⁰ Therefore, the goal of preaching is to accurately communicate the doctrine of God's Word with clarity and to apply the doctrine to the lives of the congregation. Preachers, Lloyd-Jones argues, "are called to preach the Gospel, to convey it, and to bring it directly to the individuals who are listening."¹¹ This task, he argues, "is the most urgent need in the church" and "the greatest need of the world also."¹²

The following sections show how Lloyd-Jones preached Romans 5:12–6:23 by explaining the doctrine of the text, supporting his explanation with illustrations, and applying the doctrine of union with Christ to his congregation in the 1950s.

⁹ Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899–1981* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 307.

¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 66.

¹¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 79.

¹² Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 17.

Romans 5:12–21

In his introductory messages on this section of Romans, Lloyd-Jones says, “The scope and sweep of the paragraph is one of the greatest and widest to be found anywhere in the writings of this Apostle, or indeed anywhere in the whole of Scripture. Paul seems to stand back and take a grand view of the whole panorama of Redemption.”¹³ From this panoramic perspective, Lloyd-Jones argues, the fundamental truth Paul seeks to convey is the representative nature of both Adam and Christ. Lloyd-Jones describes Adam and Christ as the “two heads to the human race,” and goes on to say that “there will never be another. And every one of us is either ‘in Adam’ or else ‘in Christ.’”¹⁴ Therefore, this section of Romans is a key biblical text for understanding the doctrine of union with Christ, and the rest of Lloyd-Jones’s exposition aims at explaining, illustrating, and applying this doctrine.

Solidarity with Adam. For Lloyd-Jones, the first step to understanding the doctrine of the Christian’s union with Christ is a proper understanding of humanity’s natural union with Adam. Lloyd-Jones is emphatic that Adam was a historical figure. In fact, he goes so far as to say that if a person rejects a literal Adam, “the whole of the Christian case and the Christian message . . . collapses.”¹⁵ Why is that? Because God placed Adam in the unique position of “federal head or representative of the entire human race.”¹⁶ He is like an ambassador, and his actions are done on behalf of everyone he represents.¹⁷ This is why Paul can say that “sin came into the world through one man” (Rom 5:12). All the trouble that humans experience in this world can be traced back to

¹³ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 182.

¹⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 180.

¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 197.

¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 216.

¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 217.

Adam's first sin.¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones expands on this in his sermon on Romans 5:16.

Commenting on Paul's statement that "one trespass brought condemnation," Lloyd-Jones says,

Paul does not say that one sin of Adam has had the effect of leading us to follow Adam's example, and sin ourselves, and thereby bring ourselves under condemnation. He says that the judgment of condemnation has come as the result of that *one sin* committed by Adam—and that is his whole case throughout. Neither does he say that as the result of that one sin of Adam we have all inherited from Adam a sinful nature, and that because of this God condemns us. He says that the judgment to condemnation came on the "one sin." . . . It is emphatically the "one sin" that has produced the judgment to condemnation, and brought in its trail all those evil and terrible consequences.¹⁹

Therefore, humanity stands condemned before God as the direct result of every person's natural status in Adam. Preaching on Romans 5:18, Lloyd-Jones says that Adam's single sin resulted in the entire human race being "constituted legally as sinners. . . . That is our judicial standing before God."²⁰ Lloyd-Jones illustrates this truth with a hypothetical scenario, a vivid picture for his congregation, who just endured the Second World War. He says,

If one member of this country should be guilty of a misdemeanour in another country, that other country may well declare war against this country: and though you and I have not committed the misdemeanour we nevertheless suffer the consequences. The other country declares war, and we, therefore, legally in international law, have been constituted enemies of that country though we have done nothing at all in our own persons.²¹

Lloyd-Jones is not saying that humanity is a kind of innocent victim, suffering for Adam's transgression and condemned for no fault of his or her own. He goes on to argue that each member of fallen humanity subsequently engages in his or her own acts of sin.²² But again, the root of this ongoing sin was Adam's first sin. And the result of that first sin

¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 210.

¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 255. Emphasis original.

²⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 272.

²¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 272.

²² Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 273.

was condemnation for all humanity before any other individual sins followed. This is the state of humanity in solidarity with Adam.

Solidarity with Christ. The great burden of Lloyd-Jones's preaching on Romans 5:12–21 is to explain the doctrine of union with Christ. This doctrine is crucial for understanding salvation and the great change that has occurred in every Christian's conversion. "Our salvation," Lloyd-Jones explains, "is not a matter of forgiveness only but a radical change in our whole position and standing before God. We are now 'in Christ,' . . . formerly we were 'in Adam.'"²³ Like Adam, Christ was appointed by God as the head and the representative of every one of his people.²⁴ As representatives, both Adam and Jesus pass on the effects and the fruit of their work to their people.²⁵ Adam's sin resulted in condemnation and death; Jesus's work results in justification and life (Rom 5:15–16). Here is how Lloyd-Jones explains justification in connection with the believer's union with Christ:

God as Judge pronounces us to be righteous in Christ. In spite of what we have inherited from Adam, in spite of all the sins of which we ourselves have been guilty, God pronounces us to be clear; and that He regards us as righteous in Christ. All our sins are blotted out, and God declares us to be acceptable and righteous in His most holy sight. It is the complete and exact opposite and antithesis of that condemnation that came upon us as the result of Adam's sin and the judgement that was pronounced upon it. Nothing could be more full, nothing could be more free, nothing could present such a glorious and such a striking contrast.²⁶

Christians are brought into this justifying union by the grace of God (Rom 5:15). Grace is something humanity does not deserve. In fact, Lloyd-Jones says, fallen humanity "deserves the exact opposite."²⁷ So, grace comes as a gift, and this gift should produce

²³ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 176.

²⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 223.

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 224.

²⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 257.

²⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 232.

unshakable joy in the Christian life. Lloyd-Jones asks his congregation “Are you rejoicing?” and “Are you thrilled?”²⁸ He also demonstrates the assurance believers should experience as they comprehend this truth. Many Christians wrestle with assurance, but Lloyd-Jones says,

If you want to have assurance of salvation, the place to start is not with your feelings, but with your understanding; then the feelings will follow. The way to get assurance is not to try and feel something, but it is to grasp this objective truth. Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous.²⁹

In Christ, the believer’s fundamental position has changed. The Christian now stands before God justified, forgiven, and destined for eternal life. More than that, the Christian in union with Christ is also transferred out of the reign of sin and into the reign of grace.

The reign of sin. From the outset of his exposition on Romans 5:12–21, Lloyd-Jones wants his congregation to understand what Paul means by “sin” throughout this section of Paul’s letter. He says in his sermon on verse 12, “Sin means that a new reigning principle has come into the life of man. It means that we are in a fallen condition, that we are depraved and guilty, that our habits and our practices are governed by this reigning principle.”³⁰ Humans in solidarity with Adam experience sin’s reign both in their own powerlessness against the force of temptation and in the pervasive presence of death. In Romans 5:17 Paul says that “death reigned” because of Adam’s sin. Lloyd-Jones presses this reality upon his congregation as he tells them,

What a graphic statement that is! Can you think of, or imagine, any statement which more perfectly sums up life in this world apart from Christ than that particular phrase? “Death reigned”! Death came in as a conqueror; death triumphed over all; death held sway over ‘all flesh’. And so the whole of mankind, as the result of this

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 238.

²⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 274.

³⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 193.

one sin of Adam, has been subject to death and to the tyranny of death.³¹ Lloyd-Jones then invites his congregation to consider the general fear of death in the world: people fear the hydrogen bomb, people try and maintain their youth, and people are terrified of death because it is all around them.³² “The world is a place of cemeteries,” Lloyd-Jones preaches, “It is a place of death and gloom and end.”³³ So, life in Adam involves a life under the reign of sin and the terror of death. This should lead believers to not only rejoice in Christ but also lament for those who remain in sin. The world is a hopeless place under the reign of sin. “What men and women regard as life is mere existence; it is not even that, it is a living death.”³⁴

The reign of grace. Union with Christ ushers in a completely different experience. The believer is transferred from the reign on sin and placed under the reign of grace. Preaching on Romans 5:17, Lloyd-Jones says, “The Christian is delivered from the fear of death . . . he is ‘reigning in life’ over conquered death. He has had a victory over death already before he has met it.”³⁵ Christians can experience and enjoy victory now under the reign of grace. Lloyd-Jones clearly wanted to emphasize this truth for his congregation; he dedicated six sermons to this verse alone! Lloyd-Jones says, “grace is the only power that is big enough to take the field against sin.”³⁶ Grace, he says, is able to deal with spiritual deadness, and Paul himself is a prime example.³⁷ Grace is the transforming power at work in all of God’s people at all times in salvation history.³⁸

³¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 258–59.

³² Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 260.

³³ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 261.

³⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 312.

³⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 264.

³⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 316.

³⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 343.

³⁸ Lloyd-Jones spends an entire sermon tracing the reign of grace throughout the whole Bible

Grace enters the lives of believers in Jesus Christ and acts as a king.³⁹ Then, as the ruling power over the Christian life, grace goes to work on the Christian. And this work will not stop until the Christian is perfected in glory.⁴⁰ This truth, Lloyd-Jones argues, should fill believers with assurance.⁴¹ This truth should lead the Christian to place all his or her confidence in the grace of God in Christ, never in works or religious institutions.⁴² This truth should also make a Christian cling to Christ in all of life, especially when dealing with the realities of sin. In fact, in light of this truth, believers can stare the dark reality of their sin in the face and still rejoice! Lloyd-Jones preaches,

The more you know the blackness and the darkness of your own heart, if you are a Christian, the more it should eventually make you sing. If you only look at the blackness and the darkness of your own heart, and stay there, you are not behaving in a Christian manner. You must start there, but you do not stop there. That sight should make you fly to Christ; and then when you see the superabundance of grace that is in Him you begin to sing. So even your sin makes you sing, because you see how it has been dealt with so gloriously and so superabundantly.⁴³

This is the blessing of life in union with Christ. The Christian's entire position has changed. He or she is no longer in Adam, living under the reign of sin. The believer is in Christ, enjoying all the benefits that are found in the reign of his glorious grace. Lloyd-Jones says, every person in the world "is in one of two positions—he is either 'under sin' or else he is 'under grace'. He is either being ruled over and governed by sin, or else he is under the reign of, and is being ruled over by grace."⁴⁴ The implications of this reign of grace in union with Christ are explored and explained next in Romans chapter 6.

story. Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 326–40.

³⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 318.

⁴⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 318.

⁴¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 303.

⁴² Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 319.

⁴³ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 303.

⁴⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance*, 304.

Romans 6:1–4

The collection of Lloyd-Jones's sermons on Romans 6 is titled *The New Man*. This is a fitting summary of Lloyd-Jones's view on this chapter. He says, "This [chapter] is a teaching that puts a man on his feet, as it were, and enables him to realize who he is, and what he is, and what is being done to him under the power of the reign of grace. So it should lead him to triumph and to rejoicing and to victory."⁴⁵ It is a chapter about the transformation that happens to every believer in Christ. And it is a chapter that should lead to success in the fight against sin and the pursuit of holiness, certainly not to an antinomian license to sin. Lloyd-Jones emphasizes this point as he explains Paul's question and answer in verses 1–2. Commenting on the expression "By no means!" Lloyd-Jones asks,

Why does the Apostle put it as strongly as that? Clearly for this reason, that to put that question, or to raise that matter at all, simply shows a complete failure to understand everything that he has been saying about justification by faith only. . . . Such a man has not only misunderstood justification, he has entirely misunderstood the doctrine of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. If he had understood that, he would never raise a point like this.⁴⁶

So, what is it about the doctrine of union with Christ that will lead men and women away from a licentious spirit? In these first four verses, Lloyd-Jones emphasizes Paul's teaching that believers have died with Christ and risen with him to walk in a new life.

Lloyd-Jones is emphatic with his congregation about the necessity of understanding what it means to have "died to sin" (Rom 6:2). He says, "I do not hesitate to say that to understand the meaning of this phrase is the key to the understanding of the Apostle's whole doctrine of salvation."⁴⁷ The key to understand the meaning of this expression is to recognize that Paul is talking about a present state and condition that is

⁴⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 191.

⁴⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 10.

⁴⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 14.

true of every believer, not a process that Christians experience over time.⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones explains that death to sin means a complete death and separation from the reign of sin described in chapter 5.⁴⁹ “If you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he says, “If you are ‘in Christ’, you have finished with that, you are dead to the reign of sin, you are under the reign of grace.”⁵⁰ So, the Christian’s death to sin means a change in position, a transfer into a new realm, and the Christian’s task is to recognize and live in light of this new position.⁵¹

On this point, Lloyd-Jones uses two helpful illustrations. First, he describes the new position that American slaves experienced after the emancipation. It was a real change, but they had to learn to live in this new freedom. “You can still be a slave experimentally,” Lloyd-Jones points out, “even when you are no longer a slave legally.”⁵² Likewise, even though the believer is set free from the realm of sin, it is still tempting to live in that old way. Second, Lloyd-Jones invokes the picture of a road running between two fields. He tells his congregation to imagine that it were impossible to be in both fields at the same time and equally impossible to move back and forth between the fields. Believers, he says, are in the “Christ field,” under the reign of grace never to return to the old “Adam field.” Yet, despite this unalterable position, Satan continues to shout across the road all kinds of accusations and temptations that sometimes cause believers to stumble and sin.⁵³ Still, even when they fall, believers remain secure in Christ.

As a good pastor, Lloyd-Jones anticipates possible objections from members of

⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 15.

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 19–20.

⁵⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 20.

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 25.

⁵² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 26.

⁵³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 26–27.

his congregation. He knows that some will find this truth “too staggering . . . almost incredible.”⁵⁴ They will say, “Here I am on earth, and I listen to that voice of Satan and fall into sin; and yet you tell me that I am dead to it.”⁵⁵ Lloyd-Jones replies to his hypothetical objector, “You are! And I ask you to believe it!”⁵⁶ As this chapter will continue to show, belief becomes the primary application of the first eleven verses of Romans 6.

Expounding verse 3, Lloyd-Jones does not believe that Paul’s discussion on baptism in this verse is about water baptism, but the Spirit’s work of baptizing (incorporating) a believer into union with Christ.⁵⁷ This union is Paul’s primary focus in chapter 6 and should serve as the Christian’s main source of confidence and encouragement in the battle against sin and the pursuit of holiness. What does it mean? “You are in Christ,” Lloyd-Jones tells the believers at Westminster Chapel.⁵⁸ “And if you are in Him, what is true of Him is true of you.”⁵⁹ As Jesus has died to sin, so have his people. As Jesus lives forever in the reign of grace, so do his people. While the implications of this doctrine are profound, Lloyd-Jones emphasizes the basic simplicity of it to his congregation. He says, “The Apostle is not teaching some esoteric doctrine to certain select individuals in the Christian life; he is saying this is true of every Christian.”⁶⁰ Jesus is done with sin’s reign, and so is the Christian.

Then, moving into sermons on verse 4, Lloyd-Jones continues to unpack the meaning of this doctrine. “We have been joined unto him,” Lloyd-Jones preaches,

⁵⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 27.

⁵⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 27.

⁵⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 27.

⁵⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 30, 35.

⁵⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 39.

⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 40.

⁶⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 39.

“therefore we have been joined with him in his death. His death means the end of the relationship to the realm and the reign of sin, therefore we have died to the realm and the relationship and the reign of sin.”⁶¹ The language of burial serves as proof that this death has taken place.⁶² However, death and burial are not all the Christian’s union with Christ entails. Just as Christ has been raised, so also believers are raised to a new life. Just as Jesus rose out of the realm of sin into the eternal realm and rule of grace, so also believers live there.⁶³ God revealed his glorious power by raising Christ from the dead, and he has revealed the same power in every Christian conversion.⁶⁴ While Christians still await a future bodily resurrection, Romans 6:4 describes a present reality. Lloyd-Jones explains, “We are at this moment in a new life and in a new realm. . . . This is not something I am hoping for, it is not something I am striving after, it is true of me because I have been baptized into Christ. I died with him, I was buried with him, I rose with him; I am in the new realm.”⁶⁵ Again, Lloyd-Jones calls his congregation to recognize this truth and rejoice in this truth. Then, he helps them see why it is absurd to continue living in sin once a person grasps this doctrine of union with Christ. He says, “We shall not be allowed to live a life of sin; it is not only unreasonable as a suggestion, it is in a final sense impossible.”⁶⁶ Christians must consider this truth, and in his next several messages on Romans 6:5–11, Lloyd-Jones seeks to help his congregation continue thinking about their identity in Christ.

⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 46.

⁶² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 46.

⁶³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 53.

⁶⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 53.

⁶⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 53.

⁶⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 54.

Romans 6:5–11

Romans 6:5 is the first place where the word *united* appears in most English translations of the chapter. Lloyd-Jones comments on the use of this word and says, “it is a word that means ‘growing together’, growing together in such an intimate way that it means an essential union.”⁶⁷ Once again, Lloyd-Jones wants his congregation to see, in union with Christ, certain things that are true about Jesus are true about believers as well. This includes resurrection. Lloyd-Jones argues that Paul’s primary emphasis in verse 5 is on the current new life believers experience in Christ, but he also sees a foreshadowing of the future bodily resurrection here.⁶⁸ “Look at Him,” Lloyd-Jones instructs his church, “Keep looking at him. Because you are in Him, you are already delivered spiritually, and you will soon be delivered entirely.”⁶⁹

Verse 6 moves back to a focus on crucifixion as Paul declares that “our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing.” Lloyd-Jones works hard to clarify the distinction between “the old self” and “the body of sin” in this verse. On the old self, Lloyd-Jones is clear: this does not refer to our sin nature, but the old person every believer used to be in solidarity with Adam.⁷⁰ That old self, Lloyd-Jones preaches, is gone in Christ—crucified, dead, and buried. Therefore, recognizing one’s identity is one of the primary strategies for fighting sin as a Christian. “Be who you are,” Lloyd-Jones proclaims.⁷¹ Here he uses the humorous and memorable illustration of telling a grown man not to act like a baby. “Why do you say this to him? You do so because he is not a baby.”⁷² Likewise, a Christian should not act like she is living under

⁶⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 56.

⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 58–59.

⁶⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 61.

⁷⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 62.

⁷¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 64.

⁷² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 64.

the reign of sin. She is not. She is in Christ! Lloyd-Jones goes on and says,

That is the New Testament method of teaching sanctification. The whole trouble with us, says the New Testament, is that we do not realize what we are, that we still go on thinking we are the old man, and go on trying to do things to the old man. That has been done; the old man was crucified with Christ. He is non-existent, he is no longer there. If you are a Christian, the man that you were in Adam has gone out of existence; he has no reality at all; you are in Christ. If we but saw this as we should, we would really begin to live as Christians in this world. We would all hold up our heads, we would be able to defy sin and Satan, we would rejoice in Christ Jesus as we ought.⁷³

Once again, the primary application Lloyd-Jones presses upon his congregation is to believe God's Word. Like Abraham who believed God's promise that he would receive a son in his old age, even though all the evidence he could see with his eyes pointed against it coming to pass, Lloyd-Jones implores his people to believe God's Word about them in Christ.⁷⁴

Next, Lloyd-Jones explains what Paul means by "the body of sin" (Rom 6:6). This, he says, is our old nature.⁷⁵ "It means the body, our physical body, of which sin has taken possession."⁷⁶ So, even though believers are spiritually removed from the realm and the rule of sin, they are left in physical bodies that are still prone to sin and temptation. Lloyd-Jones illustrates this with the picture of God's people entering the promise land but still experiencing a struggle with the other nations.⁷⁷ Believers should not only recognize their new realm and their new position in Christ but also understand the end of the struggle with sin will not come until sin is eradicated from the body at the resurrection.⁷⁸ Here one senses Lloyd-Jones's pastoral heart. He has glorious truth to tell

⁷³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 65.

⁷⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 66–67.

⁷⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 69.

⁷⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 72.

⁷⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 74.

⁷⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 80.

his people, but he is sympathetic to their experience and their ongoing struggle, so he seeks to help them understand it in light of the Word.

This pastoral emphasis in Lloyd-Jones's preaching becomes even more clear in the amount of time he gives to preaching verse 11. Lloyd-Jones gives three sermons to this verse, more than most others in the chapter, so it is worth exploring why he found this particular verse to be so important for his congregation.

Lloyd-Jones recognizes the importance of this verse in Paul's writing so far in Romans. He says, "Have you realized that this is literally the first word of exhortation in the Epistle to the Romans? . . . So far we have simply been told the truth about ourselves. Now the Apostle wants us to lay hold of it, to realize it, and to begin to apply it."⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones was a firm believer in discovering and explaining the doctrine of any passage of Scripture while preaching.⁸⁰ However, he was also convinced that the work of the preacher is never complete until he has helped his congregation see how to apply that doctrine: "You are to show that this message is vitally important for them, and that they must listen with the whole of their being, because this really is going to help them live."⁸¹ Lloyd-Jones labors to do exactly that with his sermons on Romans 6:11.

He begins by explaining that the statement of verse 11 "does not deal directly with the question of our holy living and sanctification; but it does introduce us to a truth that will lead on to that, and which promotes that, in a most wonderful manner."⁸² Lloyd-Jones explains this truth in two parts. First, Paul is saying that believers "have died once and for ever to the realm and the rule and the reign of sin and death."⁸³ Second, Paul calls

⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 111.

⁸⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 86.

⁸¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, 87.

⁸² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 113.

⁸³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 121.

his readers to believe this and to realize that this has happened to them once and forever in Christ.⁸⁴ In other words, verse 11 is a call to believe everything that Paul has said in Romans 5:12–6:10. This is the command: to “consider” or “reckon” (KJV) these things as true. Paul is not calling believers to die to sin.⁸⁵ He is also not calling believers to think sin has no role in their life anymore, because they are still in the body.⁸⁶ No, Lloyd-Jones says this is a command to consider the reality of union with Christ. He says, “This verse is not telling me to accomplish anything; it just tells me to realize what has been done for me once and for ever by the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁸⁷

This reckoning, this understanding and faith in all that Paul has argued so far, should lead to three effects in the believer’s life. First, Christians who consider their union with Christ should not fear death. “Death,” Lloyd-Jones says, “as far as we are concerned, is such a defeated enemy that to pass through it really becomes the greatest gain imaginable.”⁸⁸ Second, Christians who consider their union with Christ should find strength and confidence for the ongoing fight against sin. “Sin can never take me its slave or its captive again. . . . When a Christian sins he does not sin as a slave, but he sins as a free man who is choosing to do that which is wrong.”⁸⁹ For this reason, Lloyd-Jones tells his congregation that they should never think that when they fall into sin they are at risk of losing their salvation. He illustrates this truth with the picture of a hiker, stumbling and falling to the ground when he is two thirds of the way to the top of a mountain.⁹⁰ He does not tumble and roll all the way back down, but instead picks himself back up and

⁸⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 121.

⁸⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 116.

⁸⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 117.

⁸⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 118.

⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 128.

⁸⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 128.

⁹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 129.

continues the journey. Sin does not start a Christian over at the bottom, needing justification and beginning the process of sanctification all over again. The believer in Christ is on the journey up the mountain and can stand up and keep going. Third, Christians who consider their union with Christ should experience a deep sense of assurance. “When your own child deliberately does the opposite of what you have told him to do, he does not cease to be your child,” Lloyd-Jones says.⁹¹ So, a child of God in Jesus Christ does not need to fear this loss of status. “We are going to glory,” Lloyd-Jones proclaims, “and nobody can stop us.”⁹² When Christians realize what is true about them in Christ, they will experience a diminishing fear of death, an increasing confidence in the ongoing fight against sin, and a deepening assurance. Lloyd-Jones continues to emphasize each of these benefits of union with Christ in his next few messages on Romans 6:12–14.

Romans 6:12–14

Once again, Lloyd-Jones believed that “doctrine is always to be applied. . . . It is dangerous to take a purely detached, intellectual, theological, academic interest in doctrine, and to stop at that, as it is not to be interested in doctrine at all.”⁹³ In his sermons on this section of Romans 6, Lloyd-Jones works hard to show his congregation how to apply the doctrine of union with Christ. Beginning with verse 12, Lloyd-Jones engages the topic of fighting against sin while believers remain in the “mortal body.” “Sin will try to trip us,” Lloyd-Jones warns, “it will try to dominate over the body. And we must not allow it to do so. . . . We must restrain it, we must resist it, we must fight it.”⁹⁴ The Christian should always wage this warfare from the perspective of union with

⁹¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 143.

⁹² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 145.

⁹³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 149.

⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 153.

Christ. Lloyd-Jones says,

This is . . . the key to the understanding of the whole doctrine of sanctification. . . . I myself as a new man in Christ am dead indeed unto sin, I have nothing more to do with it, and it has nothing more to do with me. I have finished with it as such—I myself. But it is here still in my mortal body, and it will continue to worry me, and I shall have to deal with it as long as I am in the mortal body. Thank God, I know that it can never get me back under its dominion; never again can it master me, never again can it ruin my soul. Impossible! All it can do is to worry me in the body. It cannot affect my salvation, it cannot affect my final destiny.⁹⁵

Therefore, Christians who long to be holy must understand the doctrine of Romans 5:12–6:11.⁹⁶ Then, they must see that allowing sin to reign is in direct contrast to God’s purposes.⁹⁷ God is working for the sanctification of his people, and he supplies all his children with power through the Holy Spirit to engage in this good warfare. Therefore, Christians must see that they are in the position to resist any sin and act accordingly.⁹⁸

This action involves both a negative and a positive element. Negatively, Christians must not give over their members in service to sin (Rom 6:13). Lloyd-Jones defines “members” as “the various parts of the body in which the powers, the faculties, the propensities which we all have as natural men and women reside.”⁹⁹ Therefore, he says that the Christian must refuse to allow any of these physical and mental faculties to work in service to sin. Willfully doing so would be like a soldier offering his service to the enemy and committing treason. Positively, a believer must give himself or herself fully in service to the Lord, and this is a wonderful privilege. Lloyd-Jones asks his congregation, “Have you ever marveled at the thought of what a privilege it is, that you can put yourself at the disposal of God?”¹⁰⁰ He goes on to illustrate this point by saying,

⁹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 155.

⁹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 158.

⁹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 160.

⁹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 162.

⁹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 165.

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 171.

“You can enter as it were into God’s recruiting office and present yourself; you can enlist and you will be accepted. You have been given the necessary qualifications, and you are taken in, and become a member of this heavenly army.”¹⁰¹ The Christian’s responsibility is to wage war against sin in response to all that God has done in Christ. Believers must take action. The Christian life is not like entering a clinic in order to rest and heal. No, the Christian life is like entering the barracks and actively fighting the great enemy.¹⁰²

Once again, the confidence for this conflict is found in the doctrine of union with Christ. Lloyd-Jones emphasizes this point as he expounds verse 14. He tells his congregation that this verse is the basis for the entire battle.¹⁰³ “It is not a command,” Lloyd-Jones explains, “it is not an exhortation, it is not a statement of the consequence of what has gone before; it is an encouragement—an encouragement to do what Paul has already been commanding us to do.”¹⁰⁴ This is a new way of living that was impossible under the law, because the law was never meant to deliver anyone from sin.¹⁰⁵ But the Christian is not under the law. The Christian is under the reign of grace. So, Lloyd-Jones tells his church,

Realize, then, all that grace means; read again the terms of the new covenant; and live as a man who has read the title-deeds, and who is proud of them, who has lost all his depression and all his hopelessness and despair, and who, looking at the glory which is coming, says to himself, “I have no time to waste, I am longing for glory, I am looking forward to it. I must press on, I must purify myself ‘even as he is pure’; I must prepare for the great day that is coming, so that when I stand before Him I shall not be ashamed.”¹⁰⁶

This is why believers cannot continue in sin, as Lloyd-Jones will continue to demonstrate

¹⁰¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 172.

¹⁰² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 174.

¹⁰³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 179.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 180.

¹⁰⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 182.

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 189.

in his next several messages.

Romans 6:15–19

In his next several sermons, Lloyd-Jones takes up the second major section of Paul’s argument in Romans 6, beginning with Paul’s second question about the believer’s relationship with sin. Lloyd-Jones argues that by “sin” in verse 15 Paul “means deliberate and persistent sin; it means continuance in a state of sin, a persistence in the habit of sin.”¹⁰⁷ This is impossible for the believer. “There is no middle position,” Lloyd-Jones says, “it is either the one or the other; and every human being is either a slave to sin or a slave to obedience.”¹⁰⁸ Every Christian was once a slave to sin, but his or her position has fundamentally changed. This becomes clear in verse 17, which Lloyd-Jones tells his congregation “contains one of the clearest definitions found in the New Testament as to what exactly it means to be a Christian.”¹⁰⁹

There are three principles Lloyd-Jones draws out and emphasizes from verse 17. First, “a Christian is a person who has undergone a great change.”¹¹⁰ This change is dramatic and involves the whole person, for a believer has exchanged one master for another. Slavery to sin has been replaced with slavery to God. Lloyd-Jones anticipates that some people in his congregation will have a hard time considering their life before Christ as slavery. So he tells them, “The slavery of sin is sometimes shown by violent sinning. . . . But . . . the same slavery can be seen in many nice and polite people who are never guilty of such violent sins. But what do they live for? For the pleasures of the world.”¹¹¹ Often the best way to see this slavery is not to look at what a person does, but

¹⁰⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 195.

¹⁰⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 201.

¹⁰⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 205.

¹¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 206.

¹¹¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 210.

what he or she fails to do. Lloyd-Jones says that it is the failure to believe in God and worship Christ which constitutes the greatest evidence of slavery to sin.¹¹²

The second principles Lloyd-Jones draws from this verse is the way in which this change comes about. Here he explains what Paul means when he says believers have been “committed” (Rom 6:17) to the biblical standard. Lloyd-Jones says this is like metal being formed in a mold, an event which the metal experiences as a passive agent.¹¹³ This is the same with the believer. Followers of Jesus do not make themselves Christians, God does. Lloyd-Jones says, “You cannot make yourself a Christian, it is a sheer impossibility. You have been ‘delivered over unto.’ Who does it? Again there is only one answer. It is God!”¹¹⁴

The third principle Lloyd-Jones gives his people from this text is an explanation of the evidence that such a change has taken place: obedience. It is not enough to know the truths of the gospel, Lloyd-Jones argues. “There are men who are still the slaves of sin, and utterly carnal, who enjoy reading the Scriptures and playing with its doctrines as others do with crossword puzzles.”¹¹⁵ No, to truly believe means to obey God.¹¹⁶ And this obedience should flow willingly and joyfully out of the believer’s life. He preaches, “The Christian is a willing slave, a happy slave, the bondsman of Jesus Christ, and his supreme desire is to live to the praise of the glory of God and of His dear Son who came into the world on account of our sins, that we might be rescued and redeemed.”¹¹⁷

¹¹² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 210.

¹¹³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 215.

¹¹⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 215.

¹¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 217.

¹¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 219.

¹¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 220.

Next, Lloyd-Jones describes this slavery to righteousness in greater detail and clarifies a few matters for his congregation. He tells them that this slavery does not mean sinless perfection, freedom from our sinful nature, or freedom from temptation.¹¹⁸ The Christian experiences all those things in this life. However, the Christian “is no longer the slave to sin as a power, as a reigning force; he has been set free by a greater power.”¹¹⁹ Believers come under the power and control and influence of God and his righteousness.¹²⁰ This is why it is impossible for a believer to be justified but not sanctified. A believer comes into solidarity with Christ, and in Christ he or she is both rescued from the penalty of the law and released from the power of sin. This is what it means to be saved, and this is humanity’s greatest need. Lloyd-Jones says, “Man as he is by nature, is completely helpless; what he needs is not good advice, not good teaching; he needs someone to save him, he needs deliverance.”¹²¹ But this is not a deliverance into complete independence, it is deliverance from one master to another.

Lloyd-Jones describes the Christian as a person “under the tyranny of love.”¹²² The believer now loves God and sees God’s love for him or her in Christ. Therefore, the only right conclusion and application is to “present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” (Rom 6:19). Lloyd-Jones makes four important observations on this statement in verse 19. First, unlike verse 11, he says, “This is an exhortation; indeed it is a command.”¹²³ Second, “As it is a command, it is obviously something that we have to do; and therefore it is something we can do.”¹²⁴ Third, “This is

¹¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 222–23.

¹¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 224.

¹²⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 225.

¹²¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 238.

¹²² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 246.

¹²³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 258.

¹²⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 259.

an exhortation or a command which is based on what has already happened to us, not on what may or can yet happen to us.”¹²⁵ Fourth, “The New Testament method and way of sanctification, therefore, is to get us to realize our position and standing, and to act accordingly.”¹²⁶ Once again, Lloyd-Jones likes the expression “be what you are” as a good summary of the way to pursue holiness. Here Lloyd-Jones works to rebuke anyone with a passive view of how a believer makes progress in the Christian life. He says that the New Testament way of holiness “is an address to our intellects and wills, to our manliness. . . . There is nothing sentimental and weak about it.”¹²⁷ Therefore, Lloyd-Jones calls his congregation to action: “You cannot, as it were, take a dose of medicine and suddenly feel perfectly well. No, you have to pull yourself up and do your exercises. . . . You have to take these ‘members’ of yours and apply them to the task, and use them.”¹²⁸ After this exhortation, Lloyd-Jones moves on to the final verses in Romans 6, giving his congregation some concluding encouragements.

Romans 6:20–23

Before starting his sermon on Romans 6:20, Lloyd-Jones takes a moment to review Paul’s argument so far from verse 12 to this point.¹²⁹ This is a characteristic element of Lloyd-Jones’s preaching. He dives deep into the particular verse or text, but he keeps the whole of Paul’s argument in mind, and he wants to help his listeners to understand their union with Christ.

In his exposition of verse 20, Lloyd-Jones first deals with the idea that unbelievers are “free in regard to righteousness.” He says this is really no freedom at all,

¹²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 260.

¹²⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 262.

¹²⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 262.

¹²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 266.

¹²⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 270.

because freedom from the rule of righteousness necessarily implies bondage to the rule of sin.¹³⁰ The nonbeliever is not controlled by righteousness, instead “what controls him is himself, his own ideas, his own thoughts, his own philosophy; indeed he is ultimately controlled, as we have seen, by sin and by Satan.”¹³¹ For this reason, Lloyd-Jones rejects the common thought that some unbelievers are good, moral men. He does not say that humans are incapable of doing anything positive or beneficial to the world apart from Christ, but that such behavior is not true righteousness in God’s sight. As far as the Lord is concerned, it is all filthy rags.¹³²

Moving into verse 21, Lloyd-Jones points out that Paul exposes the true nature of the non-Christian life as fruitless and shameful. It is fruitless because it produces no real righteousness.¹³³ It is shameful because it is a life full of offenses against God.¹³⁴ Lloyd-Jones tells his congregation that this reality should motivate them to pursue holiness in their Christian lives. He proclaims,

This is the way to mortify sin. You have to say to yourself, “No, I cannot possibly do that. If I do that, I am going back to where I was, I am going back to the kind of life out of which I have been delivered, that fruitless life, that shameful life, that life which leads to death. I cannot.” We must ever keep this as an argument before our minds.¹³⁵

Instead, a Christian must pursue righteousness, given the profound change he or she has experienced by God’s grace in union with Christ. Preaching on verse 22, Lloyd-Jones provides his summary of the doctrine of union with Christ in light of Paul’s argument so far. He says,

¹³⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 273.

¹³¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 274.

¹³² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 275.

¹³³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 277.

¹³⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 280.

¹³⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 283.

A Christian is one who is “in Christ”; and because he is in Christ he has died with Him, he has been buried with Him, he has risen with Him, he is alive unto God in Him. And because of that he is freed from sin. It has already happened; it is already true of everyone who is a Christian. We must never lose sight of that. There are those who would teach you that you can be a Christian, that you can be justified, but that you are not yet “free from sin”; that that is something at which you arrive later, that that is some further experience. Not at all! Every Christian by definition has already been set free from sin.¹³⁶

Once again, this freedom entails not sinless perfection but freedom from the reign of sin and entrance into the reign of grace. In this new position, sin is no longer the master over the Christian’s life. Sin remains, but only as a nuisance.¹³⁷ The Christian’s master is Christ, and recognizing this has massive implications for the pursuit of holiness. Lloyd-Jones preaches, “The Apostle is reminding us that as Christians we belong to God. . . . That is the real truth about a Christian, he is enslaved to God. . . . To realize this is the secret of holiness and of sanctification.”¹³⁸ What makes this truth so beneficial to the pursuit of holiness? First, a Christian must understand that while sin still calls out and tempts, he or she does not need to listen anymore.¹³⁹ In fact, to listen and obey sin would be like a soldier fraternizing with the enemy.¹⁴⁰ No, a Christian belongs to God and has been set apart for God’s purposes by God’s power. Lloyd-Jones illustrates this truth by telling his people to consider the holy vessels of the temple, or the holy mountain upon which God descended in the Old Testament.¹⁴¹ These vessels and this mountain were set apart for God’s presence and God’s purpose, and this is what God has done with the Christian as well. This should encourage believers, because “God will not allow His slaves to be taken from Him by any manner of means.”¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 290.

¹³⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 291.

¹³⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 292–93.

¹³⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 291.

¹⁴⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 293.

¹⁴¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 297

¹⁴² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 295

Lastly, Lloyd-Jones comes to verse 23, and tells his congregation “This verse . . . sums up the argument of the whole chapter.”¹⁴³ Lloyd-Jones explains the verse by highlighting three contrasts. First, every person is either a servant of sin or a servant of God: “There is no neutrality in the spiritual realm.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Lloyd-Jones asks his congregation, “Whom do you serve? For whom are you living? Who is your master? Is it sin, or is it God?”¹⁴⁵ Second, these two masters offer entirely different contracts or conditions under which their slaves serve. Sin offers wages, whereas God offers a gift. Lloyd-Jones says that people under the authority of sin are like slaves in the Roman Empire who were given a ration of food, and perhaps a small wage, for their labor.¹⁴⁶ Sin dishes out the wages that people deserve. God, on the other hand, offers a gift—something totally undeserved and totally free. And comparing this gift to the wages of sin creates the third contrast. Lloyd-Jones tells his people, “the ends to which each leads is altogether different.”¹⁴⁷ Sin pays out death. That is what the law requires, and that is all sin gives.¹⁴⁸ God, however, gives eternal life. To explain the meaning of this eternal life, Lloyd-Jones reads John 17:3 and then tells his congregation,

That is eternal life—the knowledge of God! That is true life. Death means not to know Him, and to be shut out from His presence and His glory and all His blessings; eternal life is the exact opposite. It is to know God; not merely to know about God, but to know Him, and to know Him in an ever-increasing degree of fulness. It means therefore all blessedness, unalterable and spotless holiness, and imperishable glory.¹⁴⁹

All of this, Lloyd-Jones concludes, is ours in Jesus Christ. “Everything is from Him, and

¹⁴³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 301.

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 303.

¹⁴⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 304.

¹⁴⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 305.

¹⁴⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 307.

¹⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 306.

¹⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 308.

without Him there is nothing at all.”¹⁵⁰ “We are joined to Him, we are ‘in Him’. And because of that Paul has drawn these various deductions.”¹⁵¹

Conclusion

Martyn Lloyd-Jones provides an excellent example of how to apply the doctrines of God’s Word to the hearts of God’s people. His exposition of Romans 5:12–6:23 is robustly theological and remarkably practical. He works hard at explaining Paul’s argument while always wanting his people to see the impact of this argument upon their lives. He preached to bring them confidence, assurance, and joy. So, he explains the biblical text clearly, he uses illustrations to help his listeners consider concepts that might otherwise be abstract, and he consistently tells his congregation how they can apply the message. In these messages Lloyd-Jones successfully teaches the doctrine of union with Christ from Paul’s letter to the Romans and shows his congregation how this doctrine will help them in the fight sin and pursue holiness. Therefore, Lloyd-Jones’s preaching offers strong historical and homiletical support for this project.

¹⁵⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 310.

¹⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, 311.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the preparation and implementation of the ministry project to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The preparation involved assessing the congregation at The Orchard regarding their current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ, and then creating a six-week sermon series as well as a six-week Life Group Study to teach the doctrine. Both the sermon series and Life Group study were reviewed by an expert panel. During the implementation phase, surveys were sent before and after the sermon series and the Life Group study to measure participants' growth in understanding. After describing this preparation and implementation, this chapter will also provide an overview of the content involved in the ministry project.

Preparation

The first goal of this project was to assess the current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard. To accomplish this goal, I developed the Union with Christ Assessment (UCA).¹ This brief assessment surveyed the congregation for basic demographic data, asked participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements related to the doctrine of union with Christ, and asked participants to write their own definition of three terms: justification, sanctification, and union with Christ. On January 17, 2021, members at The Orchard received a link inviting them to take the Union with Christ Assessment. One week later, a

¹ See appendix 1.

reminder link was sent to the congregation, and a total of 215 people completed the UCA. Since this first goal was considered successfully met when twenty-five people responded, the 215 responses were more than sufficient. I read each response, analyzed the answers given, and took note of key trends. The responses provided valuable information for the remainder of the project preparation. Most significantly, the UCA revealed that the vast majority of members of The Orchard were able to articulate the doctrines of justification and sanctification well, but most struggled to articulate the doctrine of union with Christ. Therefore, I determined to make one of my central aims in the project preparation to help our congregation define this doctrine in an accurate and memorable way. In the end, developing this definition was one of the most positive aspects of the entire project. After analyzing the results of the UCA, the first goal was complete.

The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on the doctrine of union with Christ. The foundation for this entire series was the biblical and historical research that I completed for chapters two and three of this project. Early on in my project planning, I determined that I would preach on the six passages from Romans 5:12–6:23 that were the focus of chapters two and three. My research in chapter two provided the necessary understanding of the biblical text itself, and my study of Martyn Lloyd-Jones's preaching from chapter three provided a model of what this kind of teaching could look like. So, with my study largely complete, I began to prepare each of the six messages on March 2, 2021.

Due to various ministry responsibilities at The Orchard (including other preaching assignments), outlining and writing this series on union with Christ spanned several months. The first three messages were completed on May 19, 2021, and that day I sent them to the expert panel for their review. This panel consisted of four preachers whom I know personally and respect greatly. Dr. Scott Lothery is the Lead Pastor at The Orchard. He has a DMin from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and over twenty years of preaching and pastoral ministry experience. Dr. Jon Nielson is the Senior Pastor of

Christ Presbyterian Church in Roselle, Illinois. He has a DMin from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and over ten years of preaching and pastoral ministry experience. Dr. Greg Scharf is the Professor Emeritus of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He has a DMin from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and over forty-five years of preaching and pastoral ministry experience. Colin Smith is Senior Pastor at The Orchard, President of Unlocking the Bible, and a board member at The Gospel Coalition. He received his ministry training at London School of Theology and has over forty years of preaching and pastoral ministry experience. Each of these men provided encouraging and helpful feedback in their evaluations of the sermon series.

After submitting the first three sermons, I received some particularly helpful, constructive feedback from Dr. Scharf on the second message. So, I revised the message and sent an updated version to the expert panel, along with the final three messages, on June 24, 2021. Each member of the expert panel then completed the Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric (SSER)² and provided feedback on the biblical faithfulness, theological precision, clarity of communication, and overall effectiveness of the six-week series. One hundred percent of the SSER responses from the expert panel indicated that the series met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Since this goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level, the goal of the project was complete.

The third goal of this project was to develop a six-session Life Group curriculum that allowed participants to explore and apply the doctrine of union with Christ. This Life Group built on the sermon series, focusing on the same passages in Romans and rearticulating much of the content sermon series itself, but in a context that allowed time for discussion and prayer. I began preparing for the Life Group study on June 28, 2021. At the outset of this preparation, I determined the location, time, and

² See appendix 2.

format for each session. The Life Group was scheduled to meet at The Orchard for six consecutive Thursday evenings from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., beginning September 16, 2021. For each session, I planned a ten-minute welcome, a twenty-minute teaching block, a fifteen-minute table discussion, a fifteen-minute teaching block, another fifteen-minute discussion, and fifteen-minutes of prayer to end the evening. Once these plans were in place, I submitted the necessary information to The Orchard's Communication Team to create a registration for the Life Group on The Orchard's website. In August and September, a description of the Life Group along with a link to register was sent to the congregation.

On August 11, 2021, I completed the speaking notes, discussion questions, and PowerPoint slides for the Life Group study and submitted this work to the expert panel for their review. This panel consisted of three pastors, all of whom I know personally and respect greatly.³ Greg Lawrence is the Pastor of Congregational Life at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. He has an MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and six years of pastoral ministry experience, including the oversight of over eighty Life Groups at The Orchard. Adam Magnuson is the Associate Pastor at Westosha Lakes Church in Salem, Wisconsin. He has an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and over ten years of pastoral ministry experience, including the oversight of small groups. Josh Parsons is the Campus Pastor at The Orchard's location in Northfield, Illinois. He has an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and over ten years of pastoral ministry experience, including the oversight of Life Groups at The Orchard's Northfield campus.

After receiving the speaking notes, discussion questions, and PowerPoint

³ This expert panel originally consisted of four pastors, but one had a family crisis that prevented him from completing the evaluation rubric. Since this happened very close to the start of the Life Group and there was no expressed goal in the project for the panel size, the expert panel was reduced to three members.

slides for the six-week Life Group study, each member of the expert panel completed the Life Group Curriculum Evaluation Rubric (LGCER).⁴ The purpose of the LGCER was to evaluate the study's biblical faithfulness, theological engagement, usefulness, and overall effectiveness. One hundred percent of the LGCER responses from the expert panel indicated that the study met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Since this goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level, the goal of the project was complete and the preparations for the project were finished.

Implementation

The fourth goal of this project was to increase the understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members of The Orchard. To measure this goal, I created a pre-project and post-project survey that was administered for both the sermon series and the Life Group study to measure the change in doctrinal knowledge.⁵

The Sermon Series

Prior to the sermon series, the pre-project survey was sent to members of The Orchard who volunteered to take the survey, listen to the six sermons, and then take the post-project survey after the completion of the sermon series. Participants were asked to create a PIN with the last four-digits of their social security number instead of leaving their name on the survey. This allowed me to compare individual responses both before and after the sermon series without compromising the participant's anonymity. Forty-seven people completed the pre-project survey.

On July 25, 2021, I preached the first message of the six-week sermon series at our church. The series itself was simply called "Union with Christ" and the first message

⁴ See appendix 3.

⁵ See appendix 4.

was titled “The Believer’s Position.”⁶ On August 1, 2021, I preached the second message, which was titled “Established at Conversion.” On August 8, 2021, I preached the third message, which was titled “Considering.” On August 15, 2021, I preached the fourth message, which was titled “Fighting.” On August 22, 2021, I preached the fifth message, which was titled “Pursuing.” On August 29, 2021, I preached the sixth message, which was called “Enjoyed Forever.”

After the series was complete, the forty-seven people who completed the pre-project survey received the post-project survey and submitted their responses. This survey explored the participants ability to define union with Christ, to explain when union with Christ is established in a believer’s life, and to articulate how the doctrine of union with Christ impacts a believer’s fight against sin, pursuit of righteousness, and assurance of eternal life. Once the post-project survey was collected, there were thirty-four people who completed both the pre- and post-project survey. So, only these thirty-four responses were analyzed. Each participant’s answer was scored using the criterion from the Survey Results Rubric.⁷ These scores were then totaled and used to run a t-test for dependent samples. This test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-project surveys: $t_{(33)} = -8.354, p < .0001$.

The Life Group Study

Prior to the Life Group study, the pre-project survey was sent to members of The Orchard who registered for the Life Group, volunteered to take the pre-project survey, and then take the post-project survey after the completion of the Life Group study. Participants were asked to create a PIN with the last four-digits of their social security number instead of leaving their name on the survey. This allowed me to compare

⁶ I will explain more about the sermon titles in the “Content Overview” section of this chapter.

⁷ See appendix 4.

individual responses both before and after the Life Group study without compromising the participant's anonymity. Twenty-five people completed the pre-project survey for the Life Group.

On September 16, 2021, I led the first session of the Life Group at our church. Like the sermon series, the Life Group study was called "Union with Christ," but the first session was titled "Defining Union with Christ." On September 23, 2021, I led the second session, which was titled "The Believer's Position: 'In Adam' vs. 'In Christ.'" On September 30, 2021, I led the third session, which was titled "The Believer's Conversion: Baptized into Christ Jesus." On October 7, 2021, I led the fourth session, which was titled "The Believer's Mindset: Consider Yourself Dead and Alive." On October 14, 2021, I led the fifth session, which was titled "The Believer's Struggle: Fighting Sin and Pursuing Righteousness." On October 21, 2021, I led the sixth session, which was titled "The Believer's Assurance: The Gift of Eternal Life."

After the study was complete, the twenty-five people who completed the pre-project survey received the post-project survey and submitted their responses. This survey explored the participants ability to define union with Christ, explain when union with Christ is established in a believer's life, and articulate how the doctrine of union with Christ impacts a believer's fight against sin, pursuit of righteousness, and assurance of eternal life. Once the post-project survey was collected, there were fifteen people who completed both the pre- and post-project survey. So, only these fifteen responses were analyzed. Each participant's answer was scored using the criterion from the Survey Results Rubric.⁸ These scores were then totaled and used to run a t-test for dependent samples. This test demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-project surveys: $t_{(14)} = -2.876, p < .006$.

Since both the sermon series and the Life Group study yielded positive,

⁸ See appendix 4.

statistically significant differences between pre- and post-project surveys, the fourth goal of this project was complete.

Content Overview

This project involved the creation of a six-week sermon series and a six-week Life Group study. The following content overview will provide the main points and highlights from the sermon series and the Life Group study. Complete sermon manuscripts and teaching notes are in appendix 5 and appendix 6 below.

The Sermon Series

The goal of this series was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ by preaching a key section of scripture that contains teaching on this doctrine: Romans 5:12–6:23. Each week, the series explained pieces of the following definition of union with Christ that I developed after my study of the biblical text: Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. Three of the six sermon titles were taken right from this definition.

Sermon 1: The believer’s position (Rom 5:12–21). This sermon began by establishing the importance of the doctrine of union with Christ by highlighting the frequent occurrence of the phrase “in Christ,” or some variation of it, in the New Testament. I showed the congregation Ephesians 1:3 which says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” This verse emphasizes that every spiritual blessing God gives his people comes to us in Christ. This includes the forgiveness of sins, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of everlasting life. Therefore, I asked our congregation, if being in Christ brings all God’s blessings into our lives, what does it mean to be in Christ? I told them my aim in the series was to help them understand the doctrine of union with Christ and how we can live in light of this glorious truth. I let them know this

would require some deep thinking, but I also promised that the effort would be worth it. Understanding the doctrine of union with Christ helps us to see God's grace more clearly, fight sin more confidently, and rest in the assurance of salvation more completely.

Next, I told the congregation that we would focus our six weeks on a single section of Scripture that helpfully presents the doctrine of union with Christ: Romans 5:12–6:23. I then provided the congregation with a one-sentence definition of union with Christ, a definition I described as a summary statement of all that Romans chapters five and six teach about this doctrine. Union with Christ, I explained, refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. I repeated this definition each week, hoping that it would stick in people's minds and hearts and be a helpful way for them to remember the key aspects of the doctrine.

After these introductory remarks, I moved into the focus of the first sermon, which was an exposition of Romans 5:12–21. I told the congregation that this passage would help us understand the first part of the definition, that union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ. Romans 5 makes it clear that there are ultimately only two kinds of people in this world. We divide humanity up in all kinds of ways, but really, everything can be reduced to two categories. Right now, I told our church, every single one of us is either in Adam or in Christ. And the difference between these two positions could not be more dramatic. Paul sums it up in 1 Corinthians 15:22 when he says, "in Adam all die . . . in Christ shall all be made alive."

The main body of the sermon focused on three aspects of the transformation that occurs when a person is transferred from life in Adam to life in Christ. First, as believers in Christ we have a new ruler. In Adam, we were ruled by sin. Now, in Christ, we are ruled by grace. Second, as believers in Christ we have a new standing. In Adam, we were condemned. Now, in Christ, we are justified. Third, as believers in Christ we have a new destiny. In Adam, we were destined for death. Now, in Christ, we are destined for life. After explaining each of these aspects of transformation, I concluded the

message with three applications: believe in Christ, rejoice in Christ, and rest in Christ.

Sermon 2: Established at conversion (Rom 6:1–4). I began this second message by restating the key goal of the series: to help our congregation understand the doctrine of union with Christ so that we might see God’s grace more clearly, fight sin more confidently, and rest in the assurance of our salvation more completely. Then, I restated the definition of union with Christ that I used throughout the series, recapped the previous week’s message on the believer’s position in Christ, and introduced the focus for this second message: union with Christ is established at conversion. I acknowledged that different believers have different conversion stories, and some seem more dramatic than others. And yet, I emphasized the truth that every conversion is dramatic since every conversion involves being baptized into Christ Jesus, being united with him in death and resurrection. Because believers have been united with Christ, his story is now our story. We have died with Christ, and we have risen with Christ. In a very real sense, we can say that what happened to Jesus has happened to us. For the remainder of the message, I set out to explain what this means.

First, I explained what it means that we have died with Christ. In part, it means our penalty is paid. We all deserve to die for our sin, but believers are so identified with Jesus that his death becomes our death. God views believers as people who are “in Christ,” and because he paid the penalty for sin, we never will. Also, dying with Christ means sin’s power is broken. Believers were once slaves to sin. Sin ruled over us. Sin held us in its grasp. But we died with Christ. And in this death, we were released from sin’s dominating power and brought under the lordship of Jesus. I emphasized that this is a truth about our position, our identity as believers, even though we continue to struggle with sin in our experience.

Second, I explained what it means that we have risen with Christ. I told our church that union with Christ means that we are so identified with Christ that it is

possible to say we have died with Christ and that we have risen with Christ as well. For the believer, resurrection is not only a future hope but also a present reality. In Christ, we who were once dead to sin walk in newness of life. I told the congregation that our next several messages would explore what this new life looks like, and I concluded this message with three implications: (1) In Christ, we cannot continue in sin. (2) In Christ, we cannot boast about our salvation. (3) In Christ, we cannot say our story is boring.

Sermon 3: Considering (Rom 6:5–11). In this third message, I restated the definition of union with Christ, and then let the congregation know that the next three sermons would focus on the way we experience this union in all of life. In general, I wanted to explain how our union with Christ makes continuing in sin illogical, inappropriate, and ultimately impossible. I believe this is Paul's primary emphasis in Romans 6, as he writes to help believers fight sin and pursue righteousness in light of our union with Christ. That is why his first command in the entire book of Romans is to consider this union (Rom 6:11). This sermon focused on that command, to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The first part of this message focused on the fact that as believers we must consider ourselves dead to sin. This means understanding that the old life is over, and we are not the people we used to be in Adam. In Christ, the believer's bondage to sin is over. Sin has lost its dominating authority over us. We still live in bodies tempted to sin and capable of sin, but we do not live in bodies that are dominated by sin anymore. I then tried to help our church see that considering this implication of our union with Christ becomes a primary motivation for resisting sin in our lives.

The second part of this message focused on the fact that as believers we must consider ourselves alive to God. Christ rose to a new life, and as his people we have risen with him. Bodily resurrection is a future hope, but spiritual resurrection (new life) is a present reality. As believers we have a new life in Christ, a life set apart and dedicated to

the glory of God. Thus, the New Testament so often describes believers as saints, not sinners. I paused on this point to help our congregation see that because of our union with Christ, “sinner” is not our defining label anymore. Instead, we are saints. We are people set apart by God for the glory of God. Therefore, when God calls us to holiness, he is not commanding us to pursue an identity that we may or may not attain. Instead, he is calling us to live in light of the identity we already have. Our responsibility, as believers, is to act accordingly.

Sermon 4: Fighting (Rom 6:12–14). In this message, I focused in on the way to fight against sin as people who are united with Christ. I restated the definition, reminded the congregation that we were focusing on the way we experience this union in all of life, and said that Romans 6:12–14 offers six tactics for the fight against sin. These six tactics served as the outline of the sermon. The first tactic is to reject sin’s authority. Believers are dead to sin, our bondage to sin is over, and so we must refuse to let sin reign over us anymore. The second tactic is to resist sin’s appeal. Sin stirs up passions that we must resist, knowing that while sin may taste sweet in the moment, it is always bitter in the end. The third tactic is to refuse to serve sin. As believers we must not willingly present our faculties as weapons for unrighteousness, like treasonous soldiers offering their service to the enemy. The fourth tactic is to submit to God’s authority. As believers, we have not been set free from sin to live in unfettered personal autonomy. We have been set free from sin to live as servants of God. So, we must bow before him daily the way a loyal subject would bow before a king. The fifth tactic is to savor God’s grace. By bringing us into Christ, God has brought us from death to life. The more we savor the truth of his gracious work in our lives, the more we will find our resolve to fight sin and honor him strengthened. Finally, the sixth tactic is to serve God. Instead of presenting our faculties in service to sin, we must offer our lives in service to God. After offering these

tactics, I concluded this message with the wonderful promise of Romans 6:14, that sin will have no dominion over us because we are in Christ.

Sermon 5: Pursuing (Rom 6:15–19). This message continued the theme of experiencing union with Christ in all of life by focusing on the way this union encourages the pursuit of righteousness. After restating the definition, and recapping the series up to this point, I began this message by communicating an important distinction between justification and sanctification: justification describes our righteous standing while sanctification describes our righteous living. The moment we believe in Christ, we receive a righteous standing. But, over the course of our lives, we are called to pursue righteous living. I highlighted the necessity of this pursuit as Paul articulates it in Romans 6:16. He makes it clear that believers cannot freely and willfully continue in sin, because that would mean voluntarily giving ourselves over as slaves to sin.

Then, I asked our church, how is the pursuit of righteousness possible? I pointed out three answers from Romans 6:17–19. First, the pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has given us new hearts. In Christ, we have new life with new desires to honor God. Second, the pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has committed us to a new standard. God is conforming us to the pattern of righteousness revealed in his Word, a pattern most clearly seen in Christ himself. Third, the pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has freed us for a new purpose. God did not release us from slavery to sin so that we could serve ourselves. He released us from slavery to sin so that we would serve him. I concluded by emphasizing that all of this is true of a person who is united to Christ, and I invited everyone to trust in him.

Sermon 6: Enjoyed forever (Rom 6:2–23). In this final message, I tried to drive home the central teachings of the entire series and encourage believers that their union with Christ is never going to end. The message also recapped the key content up to this point by drawing out the contrasts in Romans 6:20–23 between life before Christ and

life in Christ. First, we were slaves, but now we are free. This section of the message focused on our bondage to sin in Adam and our liberation in Christ. Second, we were free, but now we are slaves. This section of the message focused on our former freedom from righteousness but our current subjection to God as believers. Third, we were fruitless, but now we are fruitful. This section of the message highlighted the lack of godliness in our lives prior to faith in Christ but the harvest of holiness that comes from union with him. Fourth, we were earning a wage, but now we are enjoying a gift. This final section of the message emphasized that sin pays what we deserve (death) but that God graciously gives eternal life. Eternal life begins by knowing the Lord and continues forever into the future. This eternal life is found in only in one place: in Christ Jesus. So, the sermon series ended where it began, by highlighting that every spiritual blessing God gives comes to us because of our union with Christ, which refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

The Life Group Study

The goal of this Life Group study was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ, covering the same ground as the sermon series, but providing some additional content and space for questions, discussion, and prayer. Since the content for this study was largely the same as the sermon series, this content overview will be briefer and focus on the structure of the study and any additional content created.

Session 1: Defining union with Christ. This session was almost entirely different than anything in the sermon series. I began by sharing a bit about the Doctor of Ministry project, my own personal interest in the doctrine of union with Christ, and my plans for the Life Group. I then introduced two questions that served as the main outline for our time together in our first session: Why does union with Christ matter? And what does union with Christ mean?

I offered three responses to the question of why union with Christ matters. First, union with Christ is the heart of our salvation. As I did in the sermon series, I showed the group that every spiritual blessing comes to us “in Christ.” Second, union with Christ is the link between justification and sanctification. I explained that the doctrine of union with Christ will help us see how the doctrines of justification and sanctification are each distinct but are also each crucially important for every believer. Third, union with Christ is the bedrock of assurance. I acknowledged that many believers wrestle with assurance, but then I told the group that understanding union with Christ provides strong security for every believer. After this introductory section, the group members paused for discussion around their tables

In the second teaching section of this first session, I addressed the question of what union with Christ means. I shared some of the challenges with articulating this doctrine in a concise manner but then offered the following definition: Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. I gave a brief overview of this definition, emphasizing that it is basically a summary of what Romans 5:12–6:23 teaches about the doctrine of union with Christ. Then, I told the group we would discuss the definition piece by piece in the weeks ahead. The group members then read Romans 5:12–6:23 around their tables and discussed the text before we closed with a time of prayer.

Session 2: The believer’s position: “In Adam” vs. “in Christ.” I began this session of the Life Group by welcoming everyone back, recapping what we had covered the week before, and restating the definition of union with Christ. Then, during the teaching blocks, I covered the material from the first sermon of the six-week series, explaining Romans 5:12–21. During two breaks, the group members answered a series of discussion questions around their tables before we closed in prayer.

Session 3: The believer's conversion: Baptized into Christ Jesus. I began this session of the Life Group by welcoming everyone back, recapping what we had covered the weeks before, and restating the definition of union with Christ. Then, during the teaching blocks, I covered the material from the second sermon of the six-week series, explaining Romans 6:1–4. During two breaks, the group members answered a series of discussion questions around their tables before we closed in prayer.

Session 4: The believer's mindset: Consider yourself dead and alive. I began this session of the Life Group by welcoming everyone back, recapping what we had covered the weeks before, and restating the definition of union with Christ. Then, during the teaching blocks, I covered the material from the third sermon of the six-week series, explaining Romans 6:5–11. During two breaks, the group members answered a series of discussion questions around their tables before we closed in prayer.

Session 5: The believer's struggle: Fighting sin and pursuing righteousness. I began this session of the Life Group by welcoming everyone back, recapping what we had covered the weeks before, and restating the definition of union with Christ. Then, during the teaching blocks, I covered the material from the fourth and fifth sermons of the six-week series, explaining Romans 6:12–19. During two breaks, the group members answered a series of discussion questions around their tables before we closed in prayer.

Session 6: The believer's assurance: The gift of eternal life. In this final session of the Life Group, I began by welcoming everyone back, recapping what we had covered the weeks before, and restating the definition of union with Christ. Then, during the teaching blocks, I covered the material from the sixth sermon of the six-week series, explaining Romans 6:20–23. During two breaks, the group members answered a series of discussion questions around their tables before we closed in prayer.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This final chapter will evaluate the project to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. I will evaluate whether this project fulfilled its purpose and met its goals. I will also share some of the strengths and the weaknesses of the project. Then, I will discuss what I would do differently if I were to run the project again. Finally, I will offer some theological and personal reflections about what I learned throughout this process.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. God's work to bring his people into union with Christ lies at the very heart of Christian truth and teaching. As believers grow in their knowledge of union with Christ they will see God's grace more clearly, fight sin more confidently, and rest in the assurance of salvation more completely. However, many Christians have never heard a clear definition of the doctrine of union with Christ, and many of those who have heard of this doctrine still struggle to understand it and apply it in their personal lives. This project aimed to help members of The Orchard understand this doctrine biblically so that they might apply this doctrine practically.

Evaluating the way in which members of The Orchard are applying what they learned in the sermon series and Life Group study was beyond the scope of this project. An analysis of the pre- and post-project surveys, however, indicated that members of The Orchard did grow in their understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. Therefore,

this project successfully fulfilled its purpose. Further evaluation of the project goals will demonstrate how the project succeeded.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The following four goals were created to determine whether or not this project accomplished the stated purpose.

Assess the Current Understanding

The first goal of this project was to assess the current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard. This goal was measured using the Union with Christ Assessment (UCA),¹ and it was considered successfully met when twenty-five members completed the UCA and the results were analyzed. After receiving the invitation to take the assessment via email, 215 people responded. This number of responses was much higher than I anticipated and provided a helpful glimpse into the congregation's understanding of union with Christ, confirming one of my primary assumptions in crafting this project.

At the outset of this project, I assumed that The Orchard was full of mature believers, who loved their Bibles and could articulate sound doctrine, but who would struggle to clearly express the meaning of union with Christ. Of the 215 responses to the UCA, 180 (83.7%) indicated that they had been a Christian for more than twenty-one years. Roughly the same number (82.8%) indicated that they attended worship services four Sundays in a typical month. Therefore, I was not surprised to find that most of the respondents demonstrated a strong ability to affirm and articulate sound doctrine. For example, when presented with the statement, "I believe that forgiveness is a gift of God's grace that I receive by faith, not my own works and effort," 212 of the 215 respondents agreed. When asked to define justification, the vast majority of answers clearly expressed

¹ See appendix 1.

justification as God’s declaration of pardon and forgiveness based on Christ’s imputed righteousness. When asked to define sanctification, many respondents wrote clearly about the process of becoming more like Jesus with power supplied by the Holy Spirit. I did notice, however, that very few people wrote about positional sanctification and the way God already considers us holy in Christ, a truth I sought to bring out in my teaching.

In the final question of the UCA, respondents were asked to define union with Christ, and this question produced a far greater variety of answers. Many of the answers included biblically sound ideas but lacked clarity. Others were so vague they were difficult to understand. Some were simply wrong. The responses to this question indicated that this project was necessary. Members at The Orchard needed teaching on the doctrine of union with Christ. With the UCA sent, completed, and analyzed, the first goal of the project was successfully met.

Develop a Sermon Series

The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on the doctrine of union with Christ as Paul explains it in Romans 5:12–6:23. Union with Christ is a massive doctrine, and there are many biblical texts that could have served as the basis for this series. Romans 5:12–6:23 is a crucial text, however, and the text broke down well into six sections for the six weeks of the series. So, I determined to focus my study and preaching here. This goal was measured by an expert panel of preaching pastors from inside and outside of The Orchard. The expert panel used the Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric (SSER)² to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, theological precision, clarity of communication, and overall effectiveness of the sermon series.

After completing the sermons, I submitted them to the panel for review and received some very helpful feedback. Dr. Greg Scharf provided a substantial critique

² See appendix 2.

about the original outline of my second message. We spent an hour or so discussing the message via Zoom, and I came away with a revised message that was significantly improved. Colin Smith offered invaluable advice on how to strengthen the language, flow, and clarity of each sermon. His feedback brought strong improvements to the content of every message. Dr. Scott Lothery encouraged me to make the most of my illustrations and practical applications, given the dense doctrinal nature of the series. This advice certainly improved the delivery of each message. Finally, Dr. Jon Nielson made sure I planned to use slides or handouts while preaching to help the congregation engage well with some of the more complex outlines and new material. I am deeply thankful for the counsel I received from each member of this panel.

This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. The sermon series met this sufficiency level on 100 percent of the evaluations submitted with the rubrics. So, the second goal of this project was successfully met.

Develop a Life Group Curriculum

The third goal of this project was to develop a six-session Life Group curriculum that allowed participants to explore and apply the doctrine of union with Christ as Paul explains it in Romans 5:12–6:23. This curriculum built upon the content of the six-week sermon series. The curriculum also served as a stand-alone study, which participants would benefit from even if they had not heard the sermon series. I created this study to reinforce the teaching of the sermon series for those who heard those messages, to teach the doctrine of union with Christ clearly to all who participated in the group, and to provide space for questions, discussion, and prayer.

Once I completed writing the six-sessions for the study, I submitted them to the expert panel for review. The panel used the Life Group Curriculum Evaluation Rubric

(LGCER)³ to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, theological engagement, and overall effectiveness of the curriculum. The feedback on this study was largely positive. I only received one substantial critique, and it came from each member of the panel. There was a consensus that I had created too much content, and there would not be sufficient time to get through all the material. In the end, I was able to complete all the teaching I planned, and we had some very beneficial time for questions and answers from the whole group, but the table discussions were often cut short. Most groups were only able to work through one or two of five questions I provided for each discussion break. The expert panel wisely anticipated this problem, and I will suggest ways I could have prevented this issue in my further evaluation later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, 100 percent of rubric evaluations met or exceeded the sufficiency level. Since the goal was considered successful if 90 percent of the evaluations met this level, the third project goal was successfully met.

Increase Understanding

The fourth and final goal of this project was to increase the understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among members at The Orchard. This goal was measured by a pre- and post-project survey administered and analyzed for both the sermon series and the Life Group study.⁴ Prior to the sermon series, the pre-project survey was sent to members of The Orchard who volunteered through an online registration to participate in the project. The same volunteers received the post-project survey, and this resulted in thirty-four completed surveys that I compared and analyzed. I followed the same process for the Life Group, and this resulted in fifteen completed surveys. In both cases, t-tests for dependent samples produced successful results. The t-

³ See appendix 3.

⁴ See appendix 4.

test on the sermon survey results demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-project surveys: $t_{(33)} = -8.354, p < .0001$. The t-test on the Life Group survey results demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-project surveys: $t_{(14)} = -2.876, p < .006$. Since both the sermon series and the Life Group study demonstrated these positive, statistically significant differences, the fourth goal of the project was successfully met. In the next section, I will share some of the particular strengths of the project, including some of the specific ways participants grew in their understanding.

Strengths of the Project

By God's grace, each goal of this project was successfully met, and there are multiple strengths of the project worth highlighting.

The first and most significant strength of the project was the definition of union with Christ that I developed and used throughout the sermon series and the Life Group study. During my research for this project, I read many helpful books and articles that increased my own personal understanding of union with Christ. Yet, I never found a clear and concise definition of the doctrine itself. This is likely because union with Christ is so complex and encompasses so many other biblical truths. While I had no desire to oversimplify the doctrine of union with Christ, I did want to give our congregation a definition they might remember. After reading the responses to the Union with Christ Assessment (UCA),⁵ and seeing how well our congregation could define justification and sanctification, I wanted to help them do the same with union.

As stated above, I developed the following definition: union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. This definition came directly out of my study in Romans 5:12–6:23,

⁵ See appendix 1.

and it basically serves as a summary sentence of what that section of Scripture teaches about this doctrine. Every phrase in that sentence requires further explanation (which is why the sermon series / Life Group study were necessary), but the brevity and alliteration gave many people in our congregation a description of union with Christ they could easily remember. I was very encouraged to see so many of the post-project survey respondents include this definition in their answer to the question, “What is union with Christ?” Many people in our congregation have shared how this definition has helped them articulate the doctrine of union with Christ and remember the main aspects of the sermon series and the Life Group study.

A second strength of this project was the emphasis in the sermon series and Life Group study on the believer’s position in Christ. So much of what Paul says in Romans 5:12–6:23 has to do with the unshakable position that is ours in Christ Jesus. It is a section of Scripture full of rich statements about Christian identity, and much of this content proved to be very encouraging to our congregation. I received positive feedback for highlighting the distinction between life “in Adam” and life “in Christ,” for explaining the meaning of dying and rising with Christ, and for emphasizing the New Testament description of believers as saints. After preaching and teaching on Romans 6:11, explaining what it means to “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus,” I had multiple people tell me they found fresh confidence and joy to battle sin and pursue righteousness. One man simply said, “I really need to start thinking about myself this way. It will help me so much.” Praise God for the effect his Word had on our church.

A third strength of the project was the practical teaching on the tactics for fighting sin that I drew from Romans 6:12–14. There were six tactics in that sermon and Life Group session: reject sin’s authority, resist sin’s appeal, refuse to serve sin, submit to God’s authority, savor God’s grace, and serve God. I received very positive feedback on this content. It helped people see that the path to sanctification does require real effort on

our part. We do not simply “let go and let God.” We fight. We pursue. But we do all of this by God’s grace in light of our union with Christ. A Christian counselor in our congregation shared that he intended to use this teaching with his clients, confident that it would be useful to them. I can attest to the value of these tactics in my own life. During the week I was preparing to preach this message, I faced a particular temptation, and prayerfully ran through the tactics in my own mind and heart. After doing this, I found myself strengthened for the battle.

A fourth strength of the project was the use of illustrations. As I mentioned above, Dr. Scott Lothery encouraged me to use good illustrations as much as possible given the dense doctrinal nature of the topic. Three applications proved especially helpful to our congregation. The first was Martyn Lloyd-Jones’s illustration of the two fields.⁶ The illustration paints a picture of the believer’s unshakable new position in Christ. This new position is like being plucked out a field where sin once ruled and placed into a new field where Christ rules. An impassible road divides the two fields. So, while Satan can still shout across the road at believers, sometimes causing us to stumble and fall, all that stumbling still occurs in Christ’s field. As believers united with Christ, our position cannot change. I credited Lloyd-Jones with the illustration, and then articulated it in my own words, and many people shared how it helped them. One mom wrote me an email letting me know that her nine-year-old son referenced the illustration while driving down a country road in Wisconsin and that a great family conversation ensued.

The second particularly useful illustration was one I developed to help our congregation’s continued thinking about our freedom in Christ from sin’s tyrannical reign. I told them to imagine they once worked for the world’s worst boss, but they took a new job at a new company. That new company, however, was in the same building as the

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 26–27.

old one, and they would sometimes bump into that old boss. If that terrible boss should ever start barking orders at them, they could say in return, “No, you are not my boss anymore!” This idea of refusing to obey sin’s demands because of our freedom in Christ seemed to help many people in our congregation. In fact, I have seen a few new member applications include the phrase “Sin is not my boss anymore.”

A final illustration worth mentioning here came in the message titled “Considering.” I wanted to emphasize how helpful it is to think of ourselves in Christ as saints, and I told a story from one of my visits to Southern Seminary. During one of our breaks from class, one of my fellow students got on the phone to talk with his son who had been disobedient back at home. I am paraphrasing here, but my classmate told his child, “You are my son. I forgive you and I love you. Now, go and act accordingly.” Similar, God says to us in Christ, “You are my son, my daughter, a saint. I have forgiven you and I love you. Now, go and act accordingly.” I told our church that we do not obey to become saints. We obey because we are saints. Again, several people remarked how this illustration helped them.

The last strength of the project I will mention was the discussion that we had during the Life Group study. The Life Group provided space to pause and reflect on the material as it was taught. Members of the group interjected and asked great questions that sharpened my own thinking and helped one another. I only wish I had created more space for this kind of dialogue during the Life Group, which leads to the next section of this chapter: the weaknesses of the project.

Weaknesses of the Project

Since I mentioned five strengths of the project, I will mention five weaknesses as well, most of which related to the Life Group study.

First, while I still think limiting the biblical focus in this project to Romans 5:12–6:23 was the right decision, this forced me to leave out some other significant texts

on the doctrine of union with Christ. John 15 is probably the most glaring omission, and during the Life Group study, one of the group members asked me to address the connection between the description of union with Christ in Romans 5:12–6:23 and the description of abiding with Christ in John 15. We had some good discussion, and I think my answer was helpful, but including a few more key texts in this project would have strengthened the content. It is also interesting that Romans 5:12–6:23 never explicitly mentions the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is certainly important for a comprehensive understanding of union with Christ, and I tried to point to the Spirit's work a few times in the sermon and study content, but more teaching on the Holy Spirit drawn out of other passages of Scripture would have strengthened the project as well.

Second, the content of this project would have benefitted from more application. The sermon and Life Group session that included six tactics for fighting sin was full of application, but this was the outlier. Most of the content was doctrinal in nature, making the primary applications more cognitive (understand, believe, etc.). These are good biblical applications, but I could have done a better job relating more of this content to everyday life. While I may not have had space to do this in the sermons, I could have certainly repackaged the material in the Life Group study to give more space for this kind of application. Had I done this, I believe the teaching would have been even more beneficial to our church.

Third, the Life Group study needed more space for discussion. I have already mentioned that the discussions were rich, and the group members certainly asked helpful questions. However, as I led the group, I often needed to cut off good conversation to resume teaching to finish on time. Of the ten or so discussion questions I prepared for each session, most groups only had time to discuss a handful. The expert panel noted this issue in their review, and I should have heeded their counsel.

Fourth, one of my stated objectives for the Life Group study was its usability as a stand-alone study apart from the sermon series. In one sense, this project met that

objective. We had members of the Life Group who had not heard the sermon series, and they did not feel lost or confused. What I developed, however, is not something that would be useful for any leader other than myself to take and teach. The teaching is clearly my own, even using personal illustrations at times. So, if I want this material to be something that other Life Group leaders in our congregation can take and use as a study, I will need to do more work to adjust the material.

Finally, while I worked hard to make the teaching on union with Christ as clear as possible, there is no question that more work could produce more clarity. Union with Christ is a large, complex doctrine. Some of the concepts and categories that I introduced in this project were new for some people at our church. For example, one participant of the Life Group study had only been a Christian for nine months. This was his first-time hearing about human solidarity with Adam or Christ, total depravity, and sin as a reigning power. As I continue to teach these less-familiar topics, I will want to work to explain them as clearly and helpfully as possible.

What I Would Do Differently

Given the weaknesses mentioned in the previous section, I think there is one primary change I would make to this project if I were to run it again. Instead of having the Life Group Study meet several weeks after the sermon series itself, I would run the study at the same time as the sermon series. I chose not to do this because of scheduling challenges. (Lots of our people travel during August—the month I was assigned to preach this series—and I worried I would not get a consistent group.) If I could have paired the series and the study, the benefits would have potentially been significant.

First, this would have allowed me to drastically adjust the content for the Life Group, addressing most of the weaknesses stated above. Since it would not be necessary to teach the same material a second time, my teaching in the study could have included an exploration of other biblical passages on union with Christ, strengthening the group's

overall understanding of the doctrine. This format also would have opened more space for discussion, especially related to application. Group members could have shared how God spoke to them in the previous week's sermon and how they intended to apply God's Word in their lives. This change may also have produced a study that more groups in our church could use. If the Life Group was focused more on sermon discussion and application, it is conceivable that any Life Group could spend six weeks watching one of the sermons together (which are all available on YouTube) and then discussing the content with a written guide as well. A group could do this in six hour-and-a-half sessions. I am not sure this change would have fostered greater clarity in the content of the project, but more space for discussion and questions would have revealed more aspects of the teaching that could be clarified in the future. It seems this would be a wise and beneficial adjustment if I were to run the project again.

This change also would have allowed me to focus on only one group of participants for pre- and post-project surveys, simplifying the data collection, and focusing the project in a helpful way.

Theological Reflections

I embarked on this project because I wanted to learn. Several years ago, when I was serving as the Pastor of Student Ministries here at The Orchard, I was with our high school students on a spring break trip in Florida. It was a week to hang out on the beach, have a ton of fun, and read a solid Christian book together. The book that year was *The Hole in Our Holiness* by Kevin DeYoung, and I will never forget reading the following line: "Union with Christ," DeYoung says, "may be the most important doctrine you've never heard of."⁷ I read that sentence, put the book down, and thought to myself, I have no idea what that is. I was a pastor and a seminary student, and I did not know what

⁷ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 94.

DeYoung was talking about.

So, I began an exploration of the doctrine of union with Christ that ultimately led me to choose this topic for my ministry project. Prior to the project, I had learned some things about union with Christ, but the research, writing, preaching, and teaching involved in this project has helped me immensely. The study of Romans 5:12–6:23 in chapter 2 of this project was the first time I ever set out to articulate this doctrine in writing. The commentators and other authors I read for this research helped clarify my understanding of the crucial distinction between life in Adam and life in Christ, the significance of the reign of sin over fallen humanity, the liberation from this bondage found in Christ, and the connection between union with Christ and the pursuit of a righteous life.

The work I did to read and analyze Lloyd-Jones's preaching for chapter 3 of this project provided me a great model for what helpful exposition on this topic might look like. It also nourished my own soul tremendously. There were two aspects of Lloyd-Jones's preaching that I found particularly helpful. The first was his ability to illustrate complex doctrinal truths in a way that would connect with the people in his church. I have already mentioned how I borrowed an illustration from Lloyd-Jones in one of my sermons. But his good example also spurred me on to work hard to develop useful illustrations of my own as well. The second aspect of his preaching that helped me was his emphasis on the active nature of the Christian life. Lloyd-Jones railed against the "let go and let God" theology that was common in his day and remains present in our own. He called his congregation to reject such a passive view of the Christian life. Instead, he encouraged them to see all that God had done for them in Christ, to realize the truth about themselves as new men and new women freed from sin's tyranny and placed under God's good authority, and then to live in response. He challenged his people to fight sin and to pursue righteousness, with all the confidence that is ours in Christ Jesus. This strengthened my own faith and stimulated my writing as I prepared to preach the same

sort of message to our church. Lloyd-Jones was already one of my heroes of the faith, and my gratitude for his ministry has only increased as a result of this project.

Moving from the research sections of this project into the writing and delivery of the sermons and Life Group sessions was more challenging than I anticipated. While I had a better grasp on the doctrine of union with Christ than I had ever known before, I still found myself struggling to articulate the doctrine as clearly as I wanted for the benefit of our church. This challenge is what forced me to work out the definition of union with Christ that proved so helpful to the overall project. When I first scribbled that definition down on a piece of paper, I felt that I had finally answered the question that DeYoung's book sparked in my mind on that trip to Florida. The remainder of my preaching and teaching preparation focused on explaining that definition as clearly, biblically, and compellingly as I possibly could. Along the way, in the process of writing each message, I found my own personal understanding of union with Christ expanding and increasing. Now, at the conclusion of this project, I can truly say that I see the glories of God's grace more clearly, I fight sin and pursue righteousness more confidently, and I rest in the assurance of my salvation more completely.

This project also taught me something very important about the church. I was reminded multiple times throughout the sermon series and the Life Group study that the church is full of stumbling, struggling saints. Many people feel stuck in patterns of sinful behavior, and they wrestle to believe that there is real hope for real change. This battle can lead to two opposite errors. First, some believers slide toward a sort of legalism. They see their sin, they know it is a problem, and they want to do something about it. They mistakenly think, however, that the solution is found in more resolve, more effort, and more discipline on their own part. So, with white knuckles and ever-diminishing joy, they strive for a sort of self-righteousness that they will never attain. This leads to frustration, pride, and all kinds of problems. Another group of believers face the struggle with sin in the exact opposite way. Instead of sliding toward legalism, they begin to drift into

licentiousness. They see their sin, they know it is a problem, but they also know that God has promised to forgive them. For them, the gospel basically amounts to the truth that Jesus justifies sinners. So, they rarely fight sin and temptation but resign themselves to the way things are, declaring their dependance upon God's grace. But this often leads to the sneaking suspicion that God's supply of grace may be running low, especially given how much they are asking him to forgive.

In the end, neither the legalistic Christian nor the licentious Christian is at rest. One wonders if he has done enough good to earn God's favor, the other wonders if she has done too much wrong to remain in God's favor. Neither is battling sin well, and both benefit from the sort of teaching on union with Christ that this project sought to provide. To the legalistic believer, union with Christ reminds them that they are only acceptable in God's sight because of their relationship to God's Son. Apart from him, we are all hopelessly lost in Adam. But, by grace through faith, we enter an entirely new position. We are in Christ, clothed in his righteousness, and nothing can change this status. Therefore, we do not fight sin in order to earn God's favor, but we fight sin because he has lavished his favor upon us. We belong to him. We are saints, set apart for his glory by his grace. And now, we get to honor him with our lives without any fear of rejection or condemnation. This is liberating news for the legalistic believer to hear, and it is the kind of news many people in the church need.

Then, to the Christian passively drifting into licentiousness, union with Christ reminds them that grace is never a reason to continue in sin. This is, after all, the precise point that Paul introduces at the start of Romans 6:1 when he asks, "Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?" His answer is emphatic: "By no means!" (Rom 6:2). And why not? Because God's grace not only pardons sinners; God's grace transforms sinners. In Christ, we are not the people we used to be. We are not stuck in bondage to sin, we are liberated and brought into a new life with Christ empowered by his Spirit. We belong to him. We are saints, set apart for his glory by his grace. And now, we must honor him

with our lives, even though we do so without any fear of rejection or condemnation when we stumble and fall. This is crucial news for the licentious believer to hear, and the kind of news many people in the church need.

As I preached and taught this doctrine, I found that both kinds of people were helped. This emphasis on union with Christ will be a common part of my pastoral ministry going forward.

Personal Reflections

Throughout this project, God has blessed me with further confirmation that he has called me to give my life to preach his Word. When I was in seminary, I was torn between two paths. I wondered if God was calling me into the academy, to serve the church as a professor. Or, if God was calling me into the pastorate, to serve the church as a preacher. Any call to ministry involves both an internal desire and an external confirmation. I certainly have a desire to preach, and The Orchard's willingness to hire me as a pastor has served as the primary external confirmation of this call in my life. But this time spent working on this project has further solidified my sense of what the Lord has called me to do. I liked the research and writing involved in this project, but I loved the preaching and teaching. I have learned afresh the value of study, and the good that can come from deep, prayerful reflection on Scripture. I have learned afresh the challenge of taking those reflections and putting them into writing, writing that will speak clearly and compellingly to God's people. This is certainly hard work. And yet, there is nothing I would rather do with my life. It is an immense privilege to stand before a congregation on Sunday morning, open the Bible, and declare what it says. Working on this project further solidified my calling to preach.

Working on this project has also further solidified my conviction regarding the benefit of preaching for a local church. God's people need God's Word (Matt 4:4), and the people in our church seemed genuinely helped by this project. I have heard from

many who grew in their understanding of Scripture and increased in their love for Christ as a result of the sermon series and Life Group study. This has reminded me that while there are many things that pastors can do, there are some things we absolutely must do. We must preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2). Preaching nourishes faith, strengthens the saints, and honors the Lord whom we proclaim.

That is my greatest desire in ministry, that the Lord might use me in whatever way he sees fit to bless his people and glorify his name. By his grace, that seems to have happened through this project. And by God's grace, I hope to continue proclaiming the gospel in the local church as long as the Lord allows. I am profoundly grateful to God for the way he taught me and helped me through this entire process. Most of all, I am grateful that the Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Gal 1:4-5).

Conclusion

This chapter evaluated the project to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The success of this project was measured by four goals: (1) Assess the current understanding of union with Christ among members of The Orchard. (2) Develop a six-week sermon series on the doctrine of union with Christ. (3) Develop a six-week Life Group curriculum that allowed participants to explore and apply the doctrine of union with Christ. (4) Increase the understanding of union with Christ among members at The Orchard. Each of these four goals were met, and therefore, the project successfully fulfilled its purpose. The project was not perfect, and its weaknesses could have been addressed if the project were run differently, but there were several strengths as well. In the end, this project helped members of The Orchard grow in their understanding of union with Christ.

APPENDIX 1

UNION WITH CHRIST ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Union with Christ Assessment (UCA). The assessment asks for some basic information regarding the participant, and then asks fifteen multiple-choice questions followed by three short-answer questions. The instrument's purpose is to assess the participants present level of understanding regarding the doctrine of union with Christ.

Union with Christ Assessment

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the participant's current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. This research is being conducted by Brad Wetherell at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 20–30
 B. 31–40
 C. 41–50
 D. 51–60
 E. 61–70
 F. 75+

2. What is your gender?
 A. Male
 B. Female

3. How long have you been a Christian?
 A. 1–5 years
 B. 6–10 years
 C. 11–20 years
 D. 21+ years

4. How long have you been attending The Orchard?
 A. 1–5 years
 B. 6–10 years
 C. 11–17 years
 D. 18+ years

5. In a typical month, how often do you attend the worship service?
- ___ A. 1 Sunday
 ___ B. 2 Sundays
 ___ C. 3 Sundays
 ___ D. 4 Sundays

Part 2

Directions: These questions ask for your opinion using the following scale:

SD strongly disagree
 D disagree
 DS disagree somewhat
 AS agree somewhat
 A agree
 SA strongly agree

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below:

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | I believe that forgiveness is a gift of God’s grace that I receive by faith, not by my work and effort. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | There are certain sins in my life that I am unable to overcome. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I believe that I am able to make progress in my growth in holiness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | God commands me to exert effort in the pursuit of holiness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I understand what the Bible means when it says believers are “in Christ.” | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. | I understand what the Bible means when it says believers have “died with Christ.” | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | I understand what the Bible means when it says believers “live with Christ.” | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | I am confident that I will go to heaven when I die. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Part 3

Directions: Write a brief definition of the following words/phrases:

1. Justification
2. Sanctification
3. Union with Christ

APPENDIX 2

SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following instrument is the Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric (SSER). This provides the expert panel a tool to provide feedback in the areas of biblical faithfulness, theological precision, clarity of communication, and overall effectiveness. The instrument's purpose is to evaluate the six-week sermon series.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
Each sermon faithfully interprets the biblical text.					
Theological Precision					
Each sermon demonstrates theological accuracy.					
Clarity of Communication					
Each sermon clearly communicates the meaning of the biblical text and the application for the church today.					
Overall Effectiveness					
This sermon series will help believers better understand and apply the doctrine of union with Christ.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

LIFE GROUP CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following instrument is the Life Group Curriculum Evaluation Rubric (LGCER). This provides the expert panel a tool to provide feedback in the areas of biblical faithfulness, theological engagement, and overall usefulness of the curriculum. The instrument's purpose is to evaluate the six-week Life Group curriculum.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Union with Christ Life Group Curriculum Evaluation Rubric					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
Each session faithfully engages the biblical text.					
Theological Engagement					
Each session helps group participants consider the meaning of union with Christ and the application of the doctrine.					
Usefulness					
Each session gives the group clear instructions.					
Each session fosters good conversation and participation among group members.					
Overall Effectiveness					
This Life Group curriculum will help believers better understand and apply the doctrine of union with Christ.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

The following instrument is the pre-project and post-project survey. The survey asks for some basic information regarding the participant and then asks five short-answer questions. The instrument's purpose is to assess an increase in understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ among the participants.

Pre-project Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the participant's current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. This research is being conducted by Brad Wetherell at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

In order to anonymously track the results of assessment, please provide the last four digits of our Social Security Number: _____

Part 1

1. How long have you been attending The Orchard?
 A. 1–5 years
 B. 6–10 years
 C. 11–17 years
 D. 18+ years

2. In a typical month, how often do you attend the worship service?
 A. 1 Sunday
 B. 2 Sundays
 C. 3 Sundays
 D. 4 Sundays

Part 2

Directions: Write a brief answer to the following questions:

1. What is union with Christ?
2. When did God unite you to Christ?
3. How does your union with Christ help you resist sin?
4. How does your union with Christ help you pursue righteousness?
5. How does your union with Christ strengthen your assurance of eternal life?

Post-project Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the participant's current understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ. This research is being conducted by Brad Wetherell at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

In order to anonymously track the results of assessment, please provide the last four digits of our Social Security Number: _____

Part 1

1. How many of the six sermons did you listen to? _____
2. How many of the six Life Group sessions did you attend? _____

Part 2

Directions: Write a brief answer to the following questions:

1. What is union with Christ?
2. When did God unite you to Christ?
3. How does your union with Christ help you resist sin?
4. How does your union with Christ help you grow in holiness?
5. How does your union with Christ strengthen your assurance of eternal life?

Survey Results Rubric

In order to analyze the data from the pre-project survey and the post-project survey with a t test for dependent samples, each participant was assigned a score for each of their answers using the following rubric. These scores were then totaled and analyzed in the t test.

	1 Minimal or Novice	2 Partial or Intermediate	3 Proficient or Acceptable	4 Distinguished
Question 1				
Question 2				
Question 3				
Question 4				
Question 5				

The following paragraphs describe the criterion for assigning the score for each question.

Question 1: What is union with Christ?

This project defined union with Christ as the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. The following scores were assigned based on the participant’s answer including the key elements of this definition:

- 1 – The participant did not include any key elements of the definition.
- 2 – The participant included some of the key elements of the definition.
- 3 – The participant included most of the key elements of the definition.
- 4 – The participant included all of the key elements of the definition.

Question 2: When did God unite you to Christ?

This project asserted that union with Christ is established at the moment of a believer’s conversion, when a believer died with Christ and rose with Christ to newness of life. The following scores were assigned based on the participant’s ability to articulate the link between union with Christ and conversion:

- 1 – The participant did not articulate any connection between union and conversion.
- 2 – The participant articulated some connection between union and conversion.
- 3 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and conversion.
- 4 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and conversion, specifically using the language of dying and rising with Christ.

Question 3: How does your union with Christ help you resist sin?

This project asserted that union with Christ involves dying and rising with Christ. Dying with Christ means the end of sin’s reign over the believer and a whole new ability to

resist sin's power. The following scores were assigned based on the participant's ability to articulate the link between union with Christ and resisting sin:

- 1 – The participant did not articulate any connection between union and resisting sin.
- 2 – The participant articulated some connection between union and resisting sin.
- 3 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and resisting sin.
- 4 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and resisting sin, specifically mentioning dying with Christ and coming out from sin's reign.

Question 4: How does your union with Christ help you pursue righteousness?

This project asserted that union with Christ involves dying and rising with Christ. Rising with Christ means the beginning of a new life of service to God marked by the pursuit of righteousness. The following scores were assigned based on the participant's ability to articulate the link between union with Christ and pursuing righteousness:

- 1 – The participant did not articulate any connection between union and pursuing righteousness.
- 2 – The participant articulated some connection between union and pursuing righteousness.
- 3 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and pursuing righteousness.
- 4 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and pursuing righteousness, specifically mentioning rising with Christ and living under God's authority.

Question 5: How does your union with Christ strengthen your assurance of eternal life?

This project asserted that a believer's union with Christ will never end. Once God unites a person to Christ, that person will remain in Christ for all of eternity. The following scores were assigned based on the participant's ability to articulate the link between union with Christ and assurance of eternal life.

- 1 – The participant did not articulate any connection between union and assurance.
- 2 – The participant articulated some connection between union and assurance.
- 3 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and assurance.
- 4 – The participant articulated a clear connection between union and assurance, specifically articulating the confidence that this union is established by God and eternal.

APPENDIX 5
SERMON SERIES

The goal of this series was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ by preaching a key section of scripture that presents this doctrine: Romans 5:12–6:23. The series explained pieces of the following definition each week: union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. My prayer is that this series helped the congregation at The Orchard see the glory of God's grace with greater clarity, fight sin and pursue holiness with greater confidence, and rest in the assurance of salvation with greater joy.

“The Believer’s Position”
Romans 5:12-21
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 7/25/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans chapter 5.

- Today we are beginning a six-week series that will take us from Romans 5:12 all the way through Romans 6:23.
- And this is a series I have been looking forward to for a long time.

For a couple years now, I have been studying these chapters,

- Meditating on what God says to us here,
- And I have found this section of Scripture extremely encouraging.

Romans 5 and 6 have helped me see God’s grace more clearly,

- to fight sin more confidently,
- and to rest in the assurance of salvation more completely.

And I’m praying that will be your experience too

- as we explore these chapters together
- over the next few weeks.

And that experience...

- seeing God’s grace more clearly,
- fighting sin more confidently,
- and resting in the assurance of salvation more completely...

That happens as we grasp the central teaching of these two chapters, which is the doctrine of a believer’s union with Christ.

I’m not sure how familiar you are with the phrase “union with Christ,”

- but it is a truth that runs all through the Bible.
- In fact, it’s so pervasive, that it’s easy to miss!

Union with Christ typically shows up in the two little words, “in Christ.”

- That short expression,
- or some variation of it like “in the Lord” or “in him,”
- shows up hundreds of times in the New Testament.

And it is often loaded with meaning.

Here’s just one example: In Ephesians 1:3 Paul says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*

Do you see that? Every spiritual blessing that God gives us... the forgiveness of sins... the power of the Holy Spirit... the hope of everlasting life... and on and on we could go...

Every spiritual blessing comes to us ***in Christ!***

Romans 6:5 says that *we have been united with him*.

- And that reality of our union with Christ
- brings all of God's blessing into our lives.

So, what does it mean to be "in Christ," united with him?

Well, Romans 5 and 6 will help us answer that question.

- What Paul says in these chapters will help us understand what union with Christ means.
- And it will help us live in light of this glorious truth.

Now, full disclosure, this will require us to think deeply.

- This is a section of Scripture full of rich theology,
- And it will take some mental effort on our part to grasp what we find in these passages.

But that effort is worth it!

Because again, the more you understand union with Christ, which these chapters teach,

- The more clearly you will see God's grace,
- The more confidently you will fight sin,
- And the more completely you will rest in the assurance of your salvation.

So, let's make Psalm 119:18 our collective prayer as we begin: O Lord, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of your Word. Amen.

As a starting point, let me give you a one sentence definition of union with Christ that we will unpack and explain throughout this series.

This is a summary statement of all that Romans 5 and 6 teach us about this doctrine:

Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever. (Repeat)

Our passage today is Romans 5:12-21,

- Which gives us the first, foundational piece of that definition.
- **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ.**

What does it mean to be "in Christ"?

Romans 5 makes it clear that there are ultimately only two kinds of people in this world.

- We divide humanity up in all kinds of different ways,
- but really, everything can be reduced to two categories.

Right now, every single one of us is either “in Adam” or “in Christ.”

And the difference between these two positions could not be more dramatic.

- Paul sums it up in 1 Corinthians 15:22 when he says,
- ***in Adam** all die... **in Christ** shall all be made alive.*

You can think of this like belonging to one of two families.

You are either in Adam’s family or you are in Christ’s family.

- Romans 5 presents Adam and Christ as the heads of two households
- whose actions impact everyone else.

We all know that the sinful actions of a father can harm his family.

- And we’ll see that what Adam has done
- has brought great harm upon all of us.

But we also know that the righteous actions of a father can bring blessing to his family.

- And what Christ has done
- has brought great blessing to all who belong to him.

We all live in one of these two families.

All of us are born into Adam’s family.

- We are his descendants,
- And we have to deal with the devastating effects of his failure.

But this passage shows us that when we come into Christ’s family, everything changes.

- We find ourselves under the power of a new ruler.
- We find ourselves enjoying a new standing before God.
- And we find ourselves awaiting a new and glorious destiny.

This is what it means to be “in Christ.”

As believers in Christ, as members of his family, we have...

- A new ruler
- A new standing
- A new destiny

Let’s consider each of these one at a time.

- And in each point I want you to see what was true about us all “in Adam,”
- And what has become true of all who now belong to Christ.

I. Our New Ruler

The first thing we find in Romans 5 is that...

In Adam, We Were Ruled By Sin

Verse 12 says, *sin came into the world through one man.*

Paul is taking us all the way back to the beginning of human history.

- To the beginning of the Bible.
- To the moment when Adam sinned.

And he says that through Adam, sin came into the entire world.

At our house we keep our trash cans right outside our back door...

And as the week goes on, and the trash fills up, the flies multiply.

So, we try not to open the door too often or too long,

- because it seems like every time we do,
- the flies rush in.

Well, verse 12 is saying that Adam opened the door and sin came rushing into the creation.

Now, we often think of sin personally, as any failure on our part to do what God requires.

But the Bible also talks about sin as a power.

- Like a tyrant that entered the world and now rules over fallen creation
- Terrorizing fallen humanity.

And this is Paul's primary emphasis here.

- Notice in verse 21 that he says, *Sin reigned.*
- He's talking about sin as a power.

Sin is a power that began its reign after Adam's initial rebellion.

- It is a power that rules over everyone in Adam's family.
- It is a power that now defiles and dominates our human nature.

Look at verse 19: *By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.*

What Adam did in the garden ruined us!

- He disobeyed God.
- And now every member of his family is born a sinner.

That flies directly in the face of the predominant perception of human nature in our culture.

- What you hear today is that we are all born good,
- But then we are corrupted by the evils around us in world.

But the Bible is saying the exact opposite.

- We are all born sinners.
- And the world is corrupt because of the evil within us.

As members of Adam's family, we have a fallen nature.

- We do not become sinners because we sin,
- we sin because we are sinners.

Picture a plant with sharp thorns and poisonous fruit.

- When that plant first sprang up out of the ground it probably looked harmless,
- but over time it's true nature was revealed.

That's us.

- We may look very sweet and innocent when we are little,
- but as we grow our true nature reveals itself.

We all know this.

You know what it's like to ask yourself, "Why did I do that!?"

- I knew it was wrong,
- I knew it would cause problems and pain,
- why do I feel so helpless to resist temptation?"

Paul is telling you why.

- Sin is powerful.
- And it rules over every member of Adam's family.

But, when you become a member of Christ's family, this changes.

In Adam, we were ruled by sin, but...

In Christ, We Are Ruled By Grace

Notice this contrast in verse 21. Paul says, *As sin reigned... grace also might reign... through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

You can think of sin and grace as rulers of two different kingdoms.

When you become a Christian,

- you are transferred out of the kingdom where sin reigns
- into the kingdom where grace reigns.

You are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ.

And then you spend the rest of your life learning to live like a citizen of this new kingdom.

- In Adam, the power of sin produces all kinds of evil in us.
- But in Christ, the power of grace produces all kinds of good in us.

God transforms us by his grace!

Now, this is a process.

- And old habits die hard.
- So, we continue to struggle with sin.

But the power of God's grace rules over us

- And God's grace changes us
- Growing us more and more like Christ.

And here's some really good news: during this time of transformation,

- you never need to fear that the old tyrant will capture you and take you back,
- because your new ruler is infinitely stronger.

In fact, verse 20 says, *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*

This is amazing! When sin increases in your life, grace abounds more.

- When you are tempted, grace abounds more!
- When you fail, grace abounds more!

In a game of rock, paper, scissors, paper always beats rock.

And in for everyone in Christ, grace always beats sin.

Grace is God's undeserved kindness.

- We did not deserve to be transferred out from the kingdom of darkness
- into the kingdom of Christ,
- but God did this by his grace.

And, we do not deserve God's ongoing forgiveness, patience, and love toward us

- as we continue to struggle with sin as Christians,
- but God continues to give us all of these things by his grace.

In Christ, every instance of sin in your life

- becomes an opportunity for God to demonstrate the power of his grace.
- Where sin increases grace abounds all the more.

In Adam we were under the rule of sin, but in Christ we are under the rule of grace.

In Christ, we have a new ruler. And we also have a new standing.

II. Our New Standing

When we belonged to Adam's family... When we were...

In Adam, We Were Condemned

Look at verse 18. Paul says that Adam's *one trespass led to condemnation for all men*.

So that one sin,

- that one bite Adam took of the forbidden fruit,
- resulted in condemnation for everyone.

Adam's sin led directly to the condemnation of his entire family.

One trespass led to condemnation for all men.

Yes, we have all committed personal sins that have added to our guilt.

- But Paul is saying something more foundational,
- and more challenging to us.

Those personal sins may confirm and contribute to our guilt before God,

- but before we ever rebelled against him ourselves,
- we already stood condemned before him "in Adam."

As Ephesians 2 says, we *were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*.

Now, at this point you might want to say,

- "That sounds like the worst news in the entire Bible!"
- "I'm condemned for something that one man did thousands of years before I was born?!"

That's right.

But, I want you to see that this truth,

- that God deals with us in light of what one man has done,
- is actually the best news in the entire Bible.

Adam has this key role in human history.

- But he is not the only one with this kind of role.
- Look at verse 14: it says that *Adam... was a type of the one who was to come.*

There's someone else like Adam!

- Someone else one whose actions affect everything for everyone who belongs to his family.
- This, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ!

And what he did thousands of years before we were born is our hope.

Yes, in Adam, we were condemned. But...

In Christ, We Are Justified

Look at verse 18: *As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*

Adam's one trespass led to condemnation for us all.

But, Jesus's one act of righteousness leads to justification for all who belong to him.

Now, what is this one act of righteousness?

This is Paul's way of summarizing the entirety of his saving work.

This is Jesus's act of coming to earth,

- living in perfect obedience to the Father,
- dying in the place of his people,
- and rising again to everlasting life.

This is the action that Jesus took to save his people from sin.

- It's the greatest rescue mission this world will ever know.
- And at the heart of that saving work is justification,
- which is God's declaration that his people are forgiven and made righteous.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are justified.

On the cross Jesus paid the penalty for your sin.

- He bore the wrath you deserved by shedding his own blood.
- And God proved for all time that this sacrifice was acceptable and effective when he raised Jesus from the dead.

In Christ you are forgiven.

And, in Christ you are made righteous.

Listen to verse 19: *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

It is true that as followers of Jesus we are in the process of becoming more righteous as we become more like Christ.

But it is also true that God already considers us righteous because we belong to Christ.

We stand before God "in Christ," in his family,

- all the righteousness of his perfect obedience is credited to us,
- and therefore, we stand justified in God's sight.

So yes, the actions of one man affect us all, but "in Christ" that is the greatest news in the world!

Adam's rebellious action,

- which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born,
- ruined us.

But Jesus's righteous action,

- which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born,
- redeemed us!

Adam's failure led to our condemnation. Jesus's saving work leads to our justification.

This is what it means to be "in Christ."

- We have a new ruler: Grace!
- In Christ, we have a new standing before God: Justified!
- And in Christ, we have a new destiny as well.

III. Our New Destiny

In Adam, We Were Destined For Death

Again, look back at verse 12. It says, *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

God gave Adam one command.

- "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat."
- "For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Death followed Adam's sin,

- and death spread to all men.
- The final proof that all of us are sinners is that all of us die.

In Adam death is our destiny.

- And not only physical death.
- If we die under the rule of sin and the condemnation of God,
- then death is the gateway into an eternal hell of darkness and despair.

But there is a new destiny for everyone who is in Christ...

In Christ, We Are Destined For Life

Look one more time at verse 21. It says, *As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Death reigns in this world.

- It is an inescapable reality.
- But, in Christ, death will not destroy us.

Because Jesus is our risen Savior! And one day we will rise with him!

- And instead of a gateway to eternal darkness,
- death in Christ is a gateway into everlasting life.

At the end of the Second World War,

- a British intelligence officer named Payne Best was imprisoned by the Nazis.
- And one of his fellow prisoners was the German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

On the Sunday after Easter in 1945 Bonhoeffer led Best and a few others in a short worship service in which he preached about the resurrection of Christ.

And then Best, who survived the war, tells us what happened next.

He writes, “[Bonhoeffer] had hardly finished his last prayer when the door opened and two evil-looking men in civilian clothes came in and said, ‘Prisoner Bonhoeffer. Get ready to come with us.’ Those words ‘come with us’ – for all prisoners they had come to mean one thing only – the scaffold. We bade him goodbye – he drew me aside – ‘This is the end,’ he said. ‘[But] for me the beginning of life.’”¹

Friends, when you belong to Christ,

- Death may be the end of this life.
- But it is the beginning of the glorious life to come.

528.

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010),

Conclusion

This is the first thing we need to know about the doctrine of union with Christ: It is a doctrine that describes our fundamental position.

We are born “in Adam,”

- ruled by sin,
- condemned before God,
- and destined for death.

But, by his great mercy,

- God takes us from this natural position in Adam
- and transfers us into an entirely new position in Christ.

He united us with Jesus.

- We become members of his family.
- And this changes everything.

In Christ,

- we are ruled by grace,
- justified before God,
- and destined for eternal life.

When you see those two words, “in Christ,” think of all of this.

Now, as we wrap up our time today, let me offer three brief applications in light of all we’ve seen.

Three Applications

1. Believe in Christ

Here’s the natural question to ask after looking at this passage today:

- Are you in Christ?
- Are you a member of Christ’s family?

If the answer is “no” but you desire all the blessing that comes from being “in Christ,”

- Here is the wonderful news,
- It is all offered to you as a free gift.

That phrase “free gift” shows up 5 times in verses 15-17!

Christ offers you freedom from the rule of sin,

- forgiveness for every one of your failures,
- and a future of everlasting life.

He offers you all of this as a gift.

- And you receive this gift by believing in him.
- Faith is the way into Christ's family.

Listen to this glorious promise from John 1:12: *To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

We come into Christ's family,

- we receive all that Christ offers,
- when we believe in him.

So, friend, believe in Jesus.

- Come into the family!
- And receive every blessing that is found in him.

2. Rejoice in Christ

We have explored some deep theology today.

- And a true engagement with Christian doctrine should not only engage your mind,
- it should also enliven your heart!

God is after more than our attention as we study the Bible.

- He's after our affection!
- He's after our joyful praise and worship!

And how else could we respond to news like this?

As believers, God has united us with Christ.

And in Christ we have received immeasurable grace.

- In fact, where sin abounds,
- grace abounds all the more!

In Christ we have been reconciled with God.

- We are no longer defined by our rebellion.
- We are righteous in his sight!

And in Christ our fear of death,

- and the devastation that would follow,
- has been replaced by the hope of life forever and ever!

Believe in Christ! Rejoice in Christ! And lastly...

3. Rest in Christ

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “There is nothing, perhaps, in the whole range and realm of doctrine which, if properly grasped and understood, gives greater assurance, greater comfort, and greater hope than this doctrine of our union with Christ.”²

And that is because union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ.

We were “in Adam” dealing with all the disaster that came as the result of his sinful rebellion.

But we are now “in Christ” enjoying all the blessing that comes as the result of his saving work.

We have left Adam’s family.

- We have entered the Christ’s family.
- And there is no going back.

In Romans 8:38–39 Paul says, *I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.*

Brothers and sisters,

- God brought us into Christ,
- and he will not let us out!

Our position in him is permanent!

So, rest in him.

We may feel as if sin rules over us.

- We may feel as if God condemns us.
- We may feel as if death is all that awaits us.

But, if we are in Christ then none of that is true!

We are under the rule of grace,

- we are justified before God,
- and we are destined for eternal life.

We are in Christ. Let’s pray.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 30.

“Established at Conversion”
Romans 6:1-4
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 8/1/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans chapter 6.

- Today we are continuing our series in this excellent section of Paul’s letter,
- exploring the doctrine of union with Christ.

Last week I mentioned that while you may not be familiar with the phrase “union with Christ,”

- if you have spent time reading the Bible,
- you have seen this truth all over the place.

It often shows up in the two litter words, “in Christ.”

- That brief expression
- Or some variation of it like “in him” or “in the Lord”
- Shows up hundreds of times in the New Testament.

It is the most common way that the Bible describes believers.

- The word “Christian” shows up just 3 times in the New Testament.
- But over and over again, those who follow Jesus are described as being “in Christ.”

So, Sinclair Ferguson says, this should be “the overwhelmingly dominant way in which we think about ourselves.”

And understanding what it means to be “in Christ,” united with him, is extremely encouraging.

- It will help you see God’s grace more clearly.
- It will help you fight sin more confidently.
- It will help you rest in the assurance of your salvation more completely.

So, what is union with Christ?

Here’s the definition that we’re using throughout this series: **Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

That is simply a summary statement of what Romans 5 and 6 teach about this doctrine.

Last week, we focused on our “position in Christ” as we considered Romans 5:12-21.

We saw that all of us begin our lives “in Adam.”

- We are his descendants,
- we are born into his family.
- This is our natural position.

And because of Adam’s failure in the garden,

- we all find ourselves ruled by sin,
- condemned before God,
- and destined for death.

But Romans 5 tells us that Christ is the head of a new family.

- That all who believe in him are “in Christ.”
- And this becomes our new position in life.

And because of all Christ accomplished,

- We are now ruled by grace,
- justified before God,
- and destined for eternal life.

Adam’s rebellious action,

- which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born,
- ruined us.

But Jesus’s righteous action,

- which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born,
- redeemed us!

This is what we saw last week:

- All of us are in one of two positions.
- We are either “in Adam” or “in Christ.”

Now, the next part of our definition says, “Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ ***established at conversion***...”

That is the emphasis of Romans 6:1-4.

- And therefore, that is the focus of our message today.
- I want us to think about conversion.

Every believer in Jesus has a conversion story.

And the circumstances that brought about this change in your life are unique to you,

- but the dramatic change that has taken place is ultimately the same for every Christian.
- And I’m using that word “dramatic” very intentionally.

I know that some of you think your conversion story is not very dramatic.

- It's not like other stories you've heard.
- In fact, you might even think your story is kind of boring.

Well, one of my main goals today is to prove to you that there is no such thing as a boring conversion.

- "Boring Conversion" is a contradiction of terms.
- It's just not possible when you consider what God did when he brought you into Christ.

Let's jump into our passage at verse 3. It says, *Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death?*

Notice that Paul says, "Do you not know..."

- He's talking about something that these Roman Christians should know,
- something that all Christians should know.

All of us have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

What does that mean?

The typical pattern of conversion to Christianity involves....

- Hearing the good news about Jesus
- Responding to that good news in repentance and faith
- And then publicly professing that repentance and faith through baptism.

When Paul talks about baptism here,

- He's referring to all of this.
- He's referring to conversion.

And he says that when we become Christians,

- we are not simply baptized into water,
- we are baptized into Christ.

Becoming a Christian does not simply mean joining a tradition.

- Becoming a Christian does not simply mean identifying with a particular religion.
- Becoming a Christian means entering a living union with a living person.

Verse 3 is saying that when we are converted,

- Our whole lives are immersed "in Christ."
- We are baptized into him.
- We are united with him.

And then, here's what we find next in verses 3-4:

Because we have been united with Christ,

- **His story is now our story.**
- **What happened to Jesus has happened to us.**

Honestly, this is staggering, and hard to wrap our minds around.

- But we need to see it, and we need to believe it.
- Because it is a goldmine of encouragement.

At each of our conversions, something absolutely remarkable happened.

- We became so identified with Christ
- that it is actually possible to say that we died with him
- and we rose with him.

Jesus died. And in him, we have died too.

Jesus rose. And in him, we have risen too.

Because we have been united with Christ,

- **His story is now our story.**
- **What happened to Jesus has happened to us.**

Christian, this is your conversion story.

- And it's really good news.
- Let me show you why...

First, it is good news that...

1. We Died with Christ

Look at verses 3-4: *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...***

When God saves us,

- he unites us with Christ,
- and we die with Christ.

His death became our death. What does this mean and why does it matter?

It's helped me to think about this death from two perspectives:

- from God's perspective
- and from sin's perspective.

First, think about God's perspective.

When God looks at you and me what does he see?

Psalm 14:2–3 says, *The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*

God looks at us and he sees

- all our rebellion,
- all our corruption,
- and all our sin.

We might do a decent job of hiding our sin from others,

- or ignoring our sin ourselves,
- but God sees all of it.

And as the just judge of the universe,

- he will punish all of it.
- And the penalty is death.

But, Christian, when God looks at you, he sees you “in Christ.”

- And so even though he sees someone who deserves to die for sin,
- he sees someone who has died already.

As far as God is concerned,

- what happened to Jesus happened to you.
- You are so identified with Christ that his death is your death as well.

You are “in him,”

- and he paid the penalty,
- so you never will!

Think about a bomb shelter: People go in,

- and the bombs fall,
- but the shelter bears the impact
- and so the people are spared.

Friends, this is what happens when you come “into Christ” by faith.

- The judgement for your sin falls,
- but Christ bears the impact,
- and you are spared.

This the power of the cross

Christ became sin for us

Took the blame, bore the wrath

We stand forgiven at the cross

If you are in Christ, from God's perspective,

- you have died with Christ
- and the penalty for your sin is paid.

Next, think about sin's perspective.

When sin looks at you what does it see?

- Now, that may sound odd to think of sin looking at you.
- But, remember that Paul is describing sin as a wicked power at work in this world.

You and I were once slaves to sin.

- Sin ruled over us.
- Sin had us in its grasp
- But, in our death with Christ our relationship to sin has completely changed.

Look at verse 2: It says, *How can we who **died to sin** still live in it?*

Sin once ruled over us.

- Sin once held us captive.
- But now, as far as sin is concerned, we died!

When we talk about people who have died we often say things like,

- "We lost him."
- Or, "She passed away."

Well, verse 2 is saying that when we died with Christ,

- Sin lost us.
- We passed away from sin's grasp.

We are no longer under sin's control.

- That's over.
- We died to sin.

Now, here's an objection someone will want to raise right away:

If I am dead to sin...

- if my captivity to sin's tyranny is over...
- if sin lost me...
- Why do I still sin?

I know myself!

- I still face temptation.
- And I still give in.

So how can you say I am dead to sin?

- That's a really important question.
- And here's the answer.

When Paul says we are dead to sin,

- he is describing our position as believers.
- Our status in life.

He is telling us what happened to us in our conversions.

- We were released from sin's dominating power
- We were brought under the Lordship of Jesus.

Sin lost its authority over us

- Christ is our authority now
- We are dead to sin

That is our position in life.

- That is a fact that God wants us to understand
- and to believe.

And nothing can change this position.

- At the end of Romans 8 Paul is going to ask,
- "Who can separate us from our position in Christ?"
- And the answer is nothing can! No one can!

We are dead to sin.

- We are in Christ.
- Now and forever.

But, our experience in this life is more complicated.

- Because, sin is still present in this world.
- And sin can still affect us.
- Even though sin will never have dominion over us ever again.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses a helpful illustration to describe this tension between our position and our experience.

He says, picture two fields out in the countryside with a road running between them.

- One of these fields is owned by sin
- and the other is owned by Christ.

You were once in sin's field,

- but at your conversion God plucked you up and placed down in Christ's field.
- Your position has changed.

And, good news: it is impossible to cross that road again once you have been moved.

- Your position is permanent.
- You are in Christ's field and you are not getting out.

But here's the challenge you experience: sin can still shout at you across the road.

Sin can still tempt you.

- And sin can still accuse you.
- And this can still cause you to stumble and fall.

And yet, your stumbling and your falling all occurs in Christ's field!

- Which means that you can stand up again.
- And you can rejoice that your position has not changed.
- And you can learn to stay away from that road and stop listening to sin's demands.

As we'll see in the rest of Romans 6,

- the fight against sin,
- is all about learning to live in this new position.

But right here, in these first few verses,

- Paul primarily wants us to see what God did when he saved us.
- He wants us to see the radical nature of the transformation that has taken place.

When we became believers in Christ,

- we were united with Christ,
- and we died with Christ.

And since we have died with Christ,

- sin's penalty is paid,
- and sin's power over our lives is broken.

Christian, this is your conversion story. You and I died with Christ. And...

2. We Rose with Christ

Verse 4: *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.***

Union with Christ means that we are so identified with Christ

- that it is possible to say that we have died with Christ
- and that we have risen with Christ as well.

What happened to Jesus has happened to us.

And so, this verse is saying, “If you want to understand what God did at your conversion, think about the resurrection of Jesus.”

Jesus died.

- He was buried in a tomb.
- And then on the third day, he walked out alive.
- He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

The resurrection of Jesus is the epitome of a miracle.

On that first Easter Sunday a corpse began to breath,

- a heart that had stopped for 3 days began to beat again,
- eyes shut in death opened in life.

This is how powerful and glorious our God is! This is the miracle of the resurrection!

And that magnitude of miracle happened at each of our conversions!

In Christ,

- we who were once dead in sin,
- now walk in newness of life.

Again verse 4 says, *as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life.*

- New life in Christ is not only a future hope.
- New life in Christ is a present reality.

We begin to walk in newness of life from the moment we are saved.

We see this throughout the New Testament...

Think about Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus.

In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus what is required for salvation: *Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Jesus is telling Nicodemus, “You don’t just need new beliefs,

- you don’t just need new behavior,
- you need new birth!”

And true for all of us.

- We need a whole new life.
- Which is exactly what God gives every one of his people in Christ.

Listen to the way Peter describes God's saving work in 1 Peter 1:3: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

Christians are people who have been born again.

- We have new life now.
- Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *If anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**. The old has passed away (died!); behold, the new has come (risen!).*

Notice the tense of the verbs.

It does not say,

- "If anyone is in Christ he *will be* a new creation.
- The old *will pass away*;
- behold, the new *will come*."

No, this new life,

- brought about by new birth,
- is a present reality!

We are not like eggs waiting to hatch,

- hunkered down in our little shells,
- just hanging in there until the resurrection.

We are able to walk in the newness of life that we have in Christ right now.

Sure, just like young birds who emerge from the egg, we've got plenty to learn!

We stumble around.

- We trip and fall.
- We do not take off flying right away.

But we really do walk in newness of life.

- Even as we still anticipate bodily resurrection in the future.
- We have spiritually risen with Christ by the glorious work of the Father.

And in the next several sections of Romans 6 we'll learn more of what this looks like.

But today, we need to see this truth, and believe it.

Do you not know...?

Do you not know that you have been baptized into Christ?

Do you not know that you have been died with Christ?

Do you not know that you have been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life?

This is your story now

What happened to Jesus has happened to you.

When God brought us to faith in Christ,

- We died with Christ,
- and we rose with Christ.

That is the miracle every Christian's conversion.

Now, as we wrap up let me briefly suggest three implications in light of these verses.

Three Implications

Remember, Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ *established at conversion*.

- When we are converted
- We are united to Christ.

And...

1. In Christ, we cannot continue in sin.

Verses 2-4,

- along with the next several verses of Romans 6,
- are written in response to the question Paul asks in verse 1.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Paul spends the first 5 chapters of Romans magnifying the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

He proclaims the devastating reality of our fall into sin,

- the awful truth of our rebellion,
- and the condemnation that we deserve from God.

Then, he proclaims the abundant grace of God.

- He writes how God put forward a sufficient sacrifice for sin by sending his Son to die,
- and how God forgives and justifies all who turn to Christ in faith.

God's grace is so abundant,

- that Paul says in Romans 5:20,
- *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more!*

We could summarize Romans 1-5 like this:

- The more sin we see in ourselves,
- the more grace we see in God.

And after 5 chapters of that good news, Paul asks the question: *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

Is this then the logical conclusion?

- If our sin magnifies the glory of God's grace,
- shouldn't we just keep sinning so God can keep being gracious?

The answer comes in verse 2: *By no means!* Absolutely not!

Why not? Because, *How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

Do you see Paul's point?

When we understand the true nature of our conversion

- we will see that we cannot possibly go on
- willfully, unrepentantly, living in sin!

That doesn't make any sense!

We are united to Christ!

We have died with him.

- Sin's penalty is paid,
- and sin's power is broken.

We can't freely engage in the sin that cost Jesus his life.

- We can't go back to the old master from whom we have been set free.
- We're dead to all that.

And we have risen with Christ.

- We have a new life in him.
- We're called to walk in this newness of life now!

We cannot act like nothing is different.

- We cannot act as if we haven't changed.
- We are new creations in Christ!

In Christ, we cannot continue in sin.

2. In Christ, we cannot boast about our salvation.

At no point in this passage does Paul congratulate the Roman Christians for what they did

- to unite themselves to Christ,
- to die with him,
- and to rise with him.

No, God gets all the praise for conversion because it is all his work!

This is why self-righteousness has no place in the Christian life.

As Thaddeus Williams says, this is “the beauty of being in Christ. Our qualification for entry has nothing whatsoever to do with our being better than anyone else in any way. There is zero room for self-righteousness. Unlike every religious system in history in which our performance is the determining factor of our status, being ‘in Christ’ means that Jesus’s performance alone is the determining factor.”¹

There is absolutely no warrant for looking down at the unbelieving world in arrogance.

- We are who we are ...
- We are “in Christ” ...
- Because of the gracious work of God.

And, there is also absolutely no basis for looking out on the unbelieving world without hope.

No matter how lost in sin someone may seem.

- God is able to unite them with Christ,
- Causing them to die to sin and rise with him just as he did for you.

In fact, perhaps you’re listening right now and you’re thinking,

- “I feel utterly lost.”
- “I feel hopelessly stuck in sin.”

Do you see what God can do?

He can bring you into a whole new position in Christ.

- You can die to sin.
- You can rise to walk in a new life.

Christ can change you.

- Run to him in repentance and faith today.
- Find transforming grace in Christ today.

¹ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020) 50–51.

In Christ, we cannot continue in sin.

In Christ, we cannot boast about our salvation.

3. In Christ, we cannot say our story is boring.

It doesn't matter if you were converted out of a life of notorious, public, wickedness...

- Or, if you were converted as a 4-year-old in Sunday School...
- Your story is dramatic!

God brought you into union with Christ. And his story is your story too!

And, what happened to Jesus has happened to you.

- He died, and you died with him.
- He rose, and you rose with him.

Rising from the dead is not boring!

- It's miraculous.
- Every Christian conversion is a miracle.

So friends, rejoice in what God has done!

- Praise him and thank him!
- And learn to walk in the new life he has given to you.

Lord willing, that's what we'll begin to consider together next week... Let's pray.

“Considering”
Romans 6:5-11
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 8/8/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans chapter 6.

- Today we are continuing our journey through Romans 5 and 6,
- considering the glorious doctrine of a believer’s union with Christ.

Union with Christ is a doctrine that will help us

- See God’s grace more clearly
- Fight sin more confidently
- And rest in assurance more completely.

And here’s the definition of union with Christ we’re using in this series: **Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

That is a basically a summary statement of what Romans 5 and 6 teach us about this doctrine.

Two weeks ago, we focused on every believer’s position in Christ.

- We saw that we were once “in Adam,” ruined by his failure in the garden.
- But we are now “in Christ,” redeemed by his victory at the cross.

Last week, we saw that this union is established at conversion.

- Now, for the next three weeks,
- we’re going to see how this union affects our experience in all of life.

I want you to see that the doctrine of union with Christ is immensely practical!

I especially want you to see how grasping this truth will help you

- in the fight against sin,
- and the pursuit of holiness.

Fighting sin and pursuing holiness,

- In light of our union with Christ,
- Is the primary emphasis of Romans chapter 6.

Notice the question that kicks off the chapter in verse 1.

- We saw this last week, but it’s worth repeating.
- Paul asks, *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

Paul spent the first 5 chapters of Romans magnifying the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

And God's grace is so abundant,

- that in Romans 5:20 Paul says,
- *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more!*

The overarching message of Romans 1-5 is this:

- The more sin we see in ourselves,
- the more grace we see in God.

But this magnification of God's grace in response to our sin leads to the question of verse 1:

- *What shall we say then?*
- *Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

Is this then the logical conclusion?

- If our sin magnifies the glory of God's grace,
- shouldn't we just keep sinning so God can keep being gracious?

And the answer in verse 2 is emphatic: *By no means!* Absolutely not!

Why not?

Because, God has united us with Christ.

And our union with Christ makes continuing in sin

- illogical,
- inappropriate,
- and ultimately impossible.

That's the primary point in Romans 6.

- Paul wants to help us fight sin and pursue holiness,
- in light of our union with Christ.

And that's why his first command,

- in the entire letter,
- is the command to consider this union.

Look at verse 11: *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

That's the first command in the book of Romans.

- We are 149 verses into the book,
- and Paul has not issued a single imperative up to this point!

He has been preaching these stunning truths about God's grace in Christ.

He has described the believer's union with Christ.

- And now he offers his first point of application:
- Consider these things!

Think about them!

- Reflect upon them!
- Preach them to yourself!

You must do this! You must consider this! Because it will really help you!

The more you consider your union with Christ,

- The more confidence you will find as you wage war against sin,
- and run hard after holiness.

All of us are struggling with sin.

- None of us have attained the holiness we desire.
- And considering this doctrine will help us.

So, here's what we're going to do today:

- We're going to consider what it means and why it matters
- to be dead to sin
- and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let's start with the first half of the command:

1. Consider yourself dead to sin

Again, verse 11 says: *Consider yourselves dead to sin... in Christ Jesus.*

As believers in Christ,

- we become so identified with Christ,
- that it is actually possible to say that we died with Christ.

Because we have been united with Christ,

- His story is now our story.
- What happened to Jesus has happened to us.

This may be hard for us to comprehend,

- it may boggle our minds,
- but it's right here for us to see and believe.

Look at verse 5: *We have been united with him in a death like his.*

And then verse 8 says, *We have died with Christ.*

What happened to Jesus has happened to us.

- He died,
- and we have died too.

Now, our death is not exactly the same as his.

- That's why verse 5 says,
- *We have been united with him in a death like his.*

The differences are obvious.

Jesus died physically... and we have not.

Jesus died as a once-for-all sacrifice for sin... and our death does not accomplish that.

But the emphasis here is not on the obvious difference between Christ's death and ours.

- No, the emphasis here is on the stunning similarity.
- *We have been united with him in a death like his.*

And Christian, here's what that means for you, and why it matters:

A. Your old life is over

Look at Verse 6: *We know that our old self was crucified with him.*

2000 years ago,

- Jesus was crucified on a hill outside Jerusalem.
- And this verse is saying that our "old self" was crucified with him.

Your "old self" is the person you were "in Adam."

Your "old self" is your old life in your old position.

- Your "old self" is the person who was ruled and dominated by sin.
- Your "old self" is the person who stood condemned before God.
- Your "old self" is the person who was destined for everlasting death in hell.

But as a believer in Christ,

- That person is gone.
- That person is dead.
- That person was crucified with him!

Sure, you weren't there with him at the cross 2000 years ago,

- but when your union with Christ was established at your conversion,
- your "old self" died just as he died.

Paul says this personally, autobiographically, in Galatians 2:20 when he writes, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

He's saying, "Have you heard about Saul of Tarsus?"

- Have you heard of that notorious persecutor of the church?
- Well, he was crucified, he was killed, and he was buried with Jesus."

He's saying, "That old life is over.

- The person I used to be,
- He's dead."

And if you are in Christ, that's the truth about you too.

You are not the person you used to be.

- Your old self was crucified with Christ.
- Your old life is over.

Some of us wrestle with a lot of shame about our pre-Christian lives.

- The way we lived and the things we did...
- They can haunt us.

But friend, if you struggle in that way, please take this truth to heart:

- That life is over.
- That person is gone.

John Newton,

- who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace,
- and who was involved in the horrific evils of the slave trade prior to his conversion,
- once said this:

"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; *but still I am not what I once used to be*, and by the grace of God I am what I am."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are not what you once used to be.

Your "old self" was crucified with Jesus.

- That person has died.
- Your old life is over.

And that means...

B. Your bondage to sin is over

Look at verses 6 and 7: *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.*

Before we believed in Jesus, we were enslaved to sin.

In John 8:24 Jesus says, *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.*

People living in rebellion against God may think they are free.

- They may even think that they are free
- *because* they do not listen to God.

They may feel like they have broken the shackles of their religious upbringing,

- or their family customs,
- or something like this...

They may think this means they walk in freedom.

- But they are wrong.
- Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

Anyone who has attempted to live a morally spotless life

- in your own strength
- knows that it's impossible.

We are born into this bondage and we are hopelessly incapable of freeing ourselves.

But what is impossible with man is possible with God.

And here's what happened when he united us to Christ: *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.*

That phrase "brought to nothing" can be translated, "made powerless."

- Crucifixion with Christ
- Results in sin losing its power.

"The body of sin" refers to your former life under the rule of sin.

Before Christ,

- your body and all its faculties,
- was ruled by sin.

But you died.

- Your life under the rule of sin ended.
- And sin lost its dominating power over you.

Now, this is really important:

- You still live in a body that is tempted to sin.
- You still live in a body that is capable of sin.
- but you do not live in a body that is ruled by sin anymore.

That's been brought to nothing.

As theologian Tom Schreiner says, "What has been shattered is not the *presence* of sin but its *mastery* over believers."¹

As believers in Jesus,

- we are still struggling with sin,
- sin is still present in our world and in our lives,
- but we are no longer mastered by it.

And therefore, we are in the position to fight it like we never could before.

- We can resist temptation.
- We can refuse sin's demands.
- Because in Christ, our bondage to sin's power is over.

Imagine you once had the world's worst boss.

- He was rude,
- he was demanding,
- he was awful.

You dreaded going into work each day.

- But you felt helpless,
- and you felt powerless to bring about any change.

Then, thankfully, you were offered a new position with a new company.

- And you jumped at this opportunity.
- And that terrible season of work ended.

But, imagine that new job is located in the same building as your old job.

- In fact, your new office is on the same floor.
- So, you often find yourself bumping into your old boss in the hall and on the elevator.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 318.

And one day he sees you and he starts barking orders at you.

- What will you say?
- You'll say, "No! I don't work for you anymore!"

And Christian, this is precisely what you can say to sin.

You still live in this world where sin is present.

- So, you still bump into sin all the time.
- But, sin is not your boss anymore!

Your "old self" was crucified with Christ.

- Your body of sin has been brought to nothing.
- You are no longer enslaved to sin.

When sin tempts you.

- When sin makes demands of you.
- You can say, "No! I don't serve you anymore!"

And the more you consider that you are dead to sin...

- The more you call this to mind...
- The more you remind yourself that this is true...

The more strength you will find to resist sin.

This is one of the ways you experience your union with Christ in all of life:

- Consider the fact that you are dead to sin in Christ Jesus
- And fight sin with all the confidence this truth provides.

You must consider yourself dead to sin...

And second, you must...

2. Consider yourself alive to God

Again, verse 11 says, *Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

In union with Christ,

- you not only die with Christ,
- you live with Christ as well.

Look at 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.*

Paul is saying that union with Christ

- is not only about destroying our old life in sin.
- It's also about creating a whole new life in him!

Christ rose to a new life, and as his people we rise too.

Now, when you hear the word "resurrection," the first thought in your mind may be of the day when, after death, your body is raised.

On that day all of our struggles with sin will be finished forever. Because on that day Christ will remove us from the very presence of sin itself.

That is a wonderful truth,

- that's our glorious hope,
- but it's not all that Paul is talking about here.

Notice that verse 11 does not say, "Consider the fact that one day you will be alive to God in the resurrection."

No, it says, *Consider yourselves... alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

This is a present reality!

- This is a current experience.
- As believers in Christ, we are alive to God in Christ Jesus right now.

We are united with Christ,

- And just as we have gone through a death like his,
- We now have entered a new life like his.

So, what kind of life does Jesus live? What kind of life do we now live in union with him?

Look at Verses 9 and 10: *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.*

Jesus died to sin.

- And now,
- Jesus lives to God.

By saying Jesus died to sin,

- Paul means that in his death,
- he came under sin's authority.

Sin had no rightful authority over Jesus,

- since he had never sinned himself,
- but he willfully submitted himself to the powers of darkness.

And he did this for us.

- Like a soldier willfully going behind enemy lines to rescue captives,
- he came under the power of sin to set us free.

And it cost him his life.

He died. But he was not defeated.

Instead, in his death, sin was defeated!

- In his death, he paid sin's penalty for his people.
- In his death, he broke sin's power over his people.

As Calvin says, "By submitting to [sin's] dominion... for a moment, [Jesus] destroyed it forever."²

- His victory over sin is decisive and final.
- Notice verse 9 says he died to sin, "once for all!"

This will never happen again.

The power of sin that came over Christ at the cross is broken forever.

- And we are united to him,
- which means that the power of sin over us is broken forever too.

Christ died to sin,

- once for all,
- And *now the life he lives he lives to God.*

Now and forever, Christ lives for the glory of God.

And we are united with him.

- His life is our life.
- Which means we live for the glory of God too.

Glorifying God is not something we need to wait to do in heaven or in the resurrection,

- that is something we get to do right now,
- day by day.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010), 227, Logos.

That is what it means to be alive to God.

- To be alive for his glory!
- And this is the awesome privilege of the Christian life!

Think about it!

Weak, imperfect, people like us actually get to live in a way that brings honor and praise to God!

- There's no higher calling than this!
- There's no greater joy than this!

And Christian,

- you've got to know this,
- you've got to consider this.

You've got to know that God looks at you

- and he does not see a person dead in sin;
- he sees a person alive in Christ.

In Christ, your life has been dedicated and set apart for the glory of God.

- And do you know what that makes you?
- A saint.

Many people want to reserve the word "saint" for some special class of super-spiritual Christian.

- But that is not what the word means.
- A saint is someone whose life has been dedicated and set apart for the glory of God.

Therefore, the New Testament calls all Christians saints!

The word "saint" appears 40 times in Paul's letters,

- and every time it describes believers in general,
- not a special kind of believer.

For example, in Romans 1:7 he begins this letter by addressing *all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints*.

Every Christian in Rome is loved by God and is a saint in his sight!

- And we could say the same about every Christian in history,
- including every Christian in this room today.

We are saints.

- Our lives have been set apart...
- Our lives have been dedicated for the glory of God.

Now, if that wasn't amazing enough, consider this, how many times does Paul refer to Christians as "sinners" in his letters?

Not once.

He says we were sinners.

- For example, in Romans 5:8 he says
- *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

But, notice the past-tense!

- "We were still sinners."
- That's not who we are anymore.

We have died to sin and we are now alive to God!

- Our position in life,
- our identity in Christ,
- has fundamentally changed.

Yes, we still struggle with sin,

- but "sinner" is not our defining label anymore,
- we are "saints!"

And that means, when God calls us to be holy,

- He is not commanding us to pursue an identity that we may or may not attain,
- He is calling us to live in light of the identity we already have.

He's not telling us to become someone we're not. He's telling us to be who we are in Christ.

In Christ, your old life in bondage to sin is over.

- In Christ, your new life dedicated to God has begun.
- In Christ, you are a saint.

So, act accordingly.

A couple years ago I was down in Louisville taking a week-long class with a few other pastors.

- During one of the breaks,
- one of my classmates named got a call from his wife.

It turned out that one of his sons was disobeying

- and his wife called to put this boy on the phone
- for a little father-son talk.

As my friend and I were walking down the hall together

- I could catch just one side of the conversation
- and here's what he said:

"Son, mom has told me how you've been acting.

- Let me ask you something,
- what's your last name?"

"That's right. Your last name is Wells. That's who you are."

"You're a Wells. And Wells men don't act like this. We respect our parents."

"Do you understand? Good. I forgive you and I love you, son."

"Now, go and obey your mom."

He hung up, and we kept walking back to class, and I thought, "what a perfect example of how God motivates us and encourages us in the pursuit of holiness!"

He didn't say, "you need to obey so you can become my son."

- He didn't say, "You better obey so that you can keep being my son."
- No, he said, "Obey, because you are my son!"

And when we are sinning as Christians we are acting out-of-line with our identity in Christ.

So God could say to us,

- "You are my son.
- You are my daughter.
- You are a saint."

"And saints don't act like this.

- Saints are done serving sin.
- Saints honor me."

"Do you understand? Good. I forgive you and I love you."

"Now, go and obey me."

Christian, you are alive to God in Christ Jesus,

- and your life is set apart,
- for his glory.

So, go and live like it!

And remember, we don't obey him so that we can become saints.

- We don't obey him so that we can remain saints.
- We obey because we are saints!

That is New Testament encouragement for pursuing holiness!

- That's motivation for sanctification.
- Understand who you are in Christ and act accordingly.

And that is why *you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus!*

Conclusion

Lord willing,

- next week we're going to focus in more on the fight against sin,
- and then the following week on the pursuit of holiness.

But brothers and sisters, today, I want you to leave with your identity in Christ clear in your mind.

If you believe in Jesus

- (and all of this could be true of you if you will believe in him)
- here's what you need to know about yourself.

You are dead to sin.

Your "old self,"

- the person you used to be "in Adam,"
- is gone.

That person was crucified with Christ.

- And as a result,
- your bondage to sin is broken and you are free.

There is not a single temptation to sin,

- there is not a single pattern of sin,
- that owns you.

You're dead to sin.

And you are alive to God.

- You have a new life
- with a new identity.

“Sinner” is not the label that defines your life anymore.

- You are a saint!
- A saint who sins, yes, but a saint nonetheless.

And considering this,

- thinking about this,
- preaching this truth to yourself will affect your daily experience.

You will find that you cannot continue in sin!

To live that way is illogical,

- it’s inappropriate,
- and it’s ultimately impossible.

Because you are united with Christ.

And you are dead to sin

- and alive to God
- in him.

Let’s pray.

“Fighting”
Romans 6:12-14
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 8/15/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans chapter 6.

Several years ago, Bob Newhart appeared in a little comedy sketch where he played a psychologist meeting with a patient for a therapy session.

The woman in the sketch is wrestling with a crippling fear of claustrophobia.

- Newhart begins the scene by inviting her to sit down,
- and telling her that the session will cost her \$5 and will only take 5 minutes.

He asks her, “How does that sound?”

- And she says, “That sounds great. Too good to be true as a matter of fact.”
- Newhart replies, “Well, I can almost guarantee you that our session won’t even last the full 5 minutes.”

The session begins,

- she shares briefly about her battle with this fear,
- how her claustrophobia keeps her from driving through tunnels
- or even entering buildings.

Then Newhart replies, “All right... I’m going to say two words to you right now.

- I want you to listen to them very, very carefully.
- Then I want you to take them out of the office with you
- and incorporate them into your life.”

“You ready?” he asks.

- “Okay,” she says.
- And then Newhart leans in and yells at her, “Stop it!”

“I’m sorry?” she says in surprise.

- “Stop it!” he shouts back. “S-T-O-P, new word, I-T.”
- And that’s all the advice he has to give her.

They banter back and forth for a few minutes and it’s hilarious because it’s obviously absurd.

- What good does it do to simply shout “Stop it!”
- at a person facing a significant struggle?

Well, in Romans 6, Paul is addressing our most significant struggle.

He is dealing with our fight against sin.

In verse 1 he asks, *Shall we continue in sin?*

- And in verse 2 he says, *By no means!*
- In other words, he's saying, "Stop it!"

He really does say, "Stop sinning!"

- But praise God,
- that's not all he says.

Paul goes on throughout this chapter to show us

- the reason why we cannot continue in sin and
- the way we can find real strength and real confidence for this fight.

And the reason is found in the doctrine of a believer's union with Christ.

Fighting sin in light of our union with Christ is Paul's focus here in Romans 6.

- and here's how we're defining union with Christ in this series:
- **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ, established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

That is simply a summary statement of what Romans 5 and 6 teach about this doctrine.

In Romans 5:12-21

- Paul contrasts our old position "in Adam"
- With the new position believers have "in Christ."

Then, in Romans 6:1-4

- Paul reminds us that this union with Christ is established in each of our lives
- at the moment of our conversion.

After that, in Romans 6:5-11

- Paul calls us to consider the impact of this union.
- Having died with Christ, our old life stuck in bondage to sin is over.
- And having risen with Christ, our new life serving God has begun.

Now, in Romans 6:12-15

- Paul continues instructing us about how this union should affect our experience,
- especially in the fight against sin.

So, how's that fight going for you?

- How are you doing in the struggle with sin,
- and battle against temptation?

Maybe you're celebrating some recent victories and thanking God for growth.

Maybe you're feeling crushed by some recent failures and wrestling with guilt and shame.

Maybe you're weary from some struggle that has gone on for years, and you're beginning to lose hope that anything will ever change.

Maybe you're apathetic.

- Your resolve to fight temptation isn't what it used to be,
- and you're concerned that your conscience is growing dull.

However the fight is going, I am confident that this passage will help you.

In these verses, Paul gives us **Six tactics for the fight against sin**.

- Six strategies you can implement this week in the battle against temptation.
- And I'm praying you'll find this as useful as I have.

Paul says, "Stop it!" in these verses... But he also says so much more...

And here's what I'd encourage you to do.

- Think of the temptation that feels most pressing or most common in your life today.
- Bring it to mind and consider how you might fight with the tactics Paul outlines here.

Again, there are six tactics, and here's the first...

1. Reject sin's authority

Take a look at verse 12. It says, *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body...*

The first thing to notice is that word "therefore."

Many of you have heard this before,

- but it's often said that whenever you see the word "therefore" in your Bible,
- ask yourself, "What's that *there for*?"

What is Paul referring to when he says "therefore"?

- Well, he's referring back to the previous verse which says,
- *You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

As a Christian,

- as a person in union with Christ,
- you are dead to sin.

Your old life in bondage to sin is over,

- you have been released from sin's tyrannical rule,
- and sin has no rightful authority over you anymore.

Instead, you are alive to God,

- you have come under his gracious rule,
- and your life is set apart and dedicated for his glory.

That's a fact about you "in Christ Jesus."

And *therefore*, Paul says, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body."

Paul is aware of this common challenge that all Christians face:

- We are truly released from sin's power,
- but we are not yet removed from sin's presence.

Sin still assails our mortal bodies.

- Our life in the flesh is still affected by the fall.
- We still struggle.

That is every believer's experience in this life.

- Don't be surprised if you're struggling with sin.
- Don't think you're the only one.
- We're all in this fight!

But we must remember that in Christ,

- Sin affects us,
- But sin does not rule us anymore.

And so, we don't willfully submit ourselves to sin's power.

- We don't say, "Sin's inevitable, so I'll just give in."
- No, we reject sin's authority because we have been set free from sin's authority!

Like a cruel guard in a prison, sin once held us captive,

But Christ came,

- paid our penalty,
- and purchased our freedom.

He broke sin's shackles that held us fast,

- he opened the prison door,
- and called us to follow him.

So, when that cruel guard sin calls out for us to return,

- to put the chains back on,
- we can say, “No! You don’t rule over me anymore.”

We can reject sin’s authority!

- And we must reject sin’s authority.
- Because we belong to Christ!

That’s the first tactic in this fight: Reject sin’s authority. Second...

2. Resist sin’s appeal

Look at verse 12 again: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

Here’s an important question we need to ask and answer honestly: why do we sin?

If we know something is wrong,

- if we know the pain our sin can cause others
- and the shame our sin can bring upon ourselves,
- why does temptation carry so much power?

Because, if we’re honest,

- sin is appealing to us,
- at least in the moment of temptation.

Notice that word “passions” in verse 12.

- *Let not sin... make you obey its **passions**.*
- That word passion refers to a longing, a craving, a desire.

That’s why we sin.

Because temptation stirs up passion in us,

- it becomes something we long for and crave,
- something that appears desirable,
- at least in the moment.

We see this in the very first sin in the history of the world.

Why did Adam and Eve eat that forbidden fruit? Listen to Genesis 3:6: *When the woman saw that the tree was **good** for food, and that it was a **delight** to the eyes, and that the tree was to be **desired** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

So, why did Adam and Eve sin?

- Because they failed to trust God.
- Because they listened to Satan.

Both of those statements are true!

But, Adam and Eve also sinned

- because they wanted to,
- because they desired the fruit of the tree,
- because they obeyed sin's passions.

And as a result, the world was thrown into ruin.

Friends this is always the case:

- Sin may taste sweet in the moment, but it is always bitter in the end.
- Sin promises life, but it only brings death.

And so, when you face temptation,

- call this truth to mind,
- and use this truth to resist sin's appeal.

Admit to yourself, "I want to do this! I desire to sin!"

And then tell yourself,

- "But if I do the pleasure will not last."
- "Pain will come."
- "Therefore, I will not obey sin's passions."

That's a battle!

- That's not easy!
- But that's what Christians do in the fight against sin and temptation.

We reject sin's authority because Christ has set us free.

- We resist sin's appeal because we know what sin does.
- And third, we...

3. Refuse to serve sin

Look next at verse 13: *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.*

When Paul refers to your members,

- he is referring to all the faculties with which you engage with this world.
- Your body, your mind, your words, and so on.

These are your members.

- These are the parts that make up the whole of who you are.
- And he says *do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.*

That word “instruments” can also be translated “weapons.”

For example, John uses the same word in John 18:3 when he describes how Judas came with a band of soldiers to arrest Jesus *with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

Romans 6:13 is a military picture, and the meaning is clear:

- Do not use your body, your mind, or your words as weapons for unrighteousness.
- Do not enlist yourself in sin’s army and serve at sin’s command.

When Christians sin,

- we are like soldiers presenting ourselves and our weapons in service to the enemy.
- This is why R.C. Sproul has famously said, “Sin is cosmic treason.”

And this is one of the reasons why when Paul asks in verse 1,

- *Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*
- His answer is, *By no means!*

We’ve come out from sin’s authority.

- We see the destructive power of sin’s passions.
- Why would we ever allow ourselves fight *for* sin?

No, we must fight against it!

- We must refuse to allow our members to serve sin.
- We must resolve to resist temptation. Every temptation.

For some of us, our challenge is that we simply do not think the sin we struggle with is that big of a deal.

We see the obvious evils of the world around us,

- we see flagrant acts of wickedness in other people,
- and in comparison, our struggles seem tame.

But taking up arms against the Lord of the universe is no small thing.

And that is what we do when we engage our members as instruments for unrighteousness,

- whether that unrighteousness is so blatant that everyone can see it,
- or so subtle that we can barely see it ourselves.

It's crucial to call sin for what it is.

- It is rebellion against God.
- It is cosmic treason.

And therefore, we reject sin's authority, we resist sin's appeal, and we refuse to serve sin.

Instead, here's the fourth tactic: We...

4. Submit to God's authority

Paul begins with the negative commands in this passage.

- *Let not sin... reign...*
- *Do not present your members to sin...*

Now, he turns to the positive.

Look at the second half of verse 13: *Present yourselves to God...*

It's important to see that the Christian life is not just a list of negative commands.

- "Don't do this!"
- "Avoid that!"

The Christian life is also full of positive commands.

- "Do this!"
- "Pursue that!"

And in this passage, we are called, positively, to present ourselves to God,

- to come before God daily the way a loyal subject would come before a king
- and bow in submission to his authority.

We are free in Christ, but the freedom we have in is not uninhibited personal autonomy.

Many people today want a kind of freedom that allows them to determine

- their own identity,
- their own morality,
- and their own destiny.

But as we've seen in Romans 6,

- a life apart from God's authority is not freedom.
- It is slavery to that tyrant called sin.

But when Christ comes and releases us from sin's grip,

- he takes hold of us,
- and he brings us under the authority of God.
- And there is no better place to be.

In fact, living under God's authority, is the only way to truly enjoy the kind of freedom we were made to experience.

Tim Keller illustrates this with the picture of a fish.

He writes, "Because a fish absorbs oxygen from water, not air, it's free only if it's restricted to water. If a fish is 'freed' from the river & put out on the grass to explore, its freedom to move and soon [to] live is destroyed. Real freedom isn't [ridding ourselves of all restrictions], it's finding the right ones."¹

As believers in Jesus, we have come under the right restrictions.

- We live under the authority of God.
- And his commands are always just and his ways are always good.

So, present yourselves to God,

- Submit your life to his authority.
- With great joy!

And when you are tempted to sin, take active measures to remind yourself of his authority.

One very practical way to do that is to pray the Lord's prayer.

Pray, *Father, hallowed be your name*. Tell him that you want him to receive the glory he is due.

Pray, *Your will be done*. Tell him that you want to follow his commands.

Pray, *Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil*. Tell him you need strength to fight.

And brothers and sisters, believe this promise from 1 Corinthians 10:13: *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*.

Reject sin's authority. Resist sin's appeal. Refuse to serve sin.

Instead, submit to God's authority.

And here's the fifth tactic:

¹ Timothy Keller (@timkellernyc), Twitter, November 17, 2018, 1:23 p.m., <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/1067499050092687362?lang=en>

5. Savor God's grace

Look at verse 13: *Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...*

Notice that Paul says we present ourselves to God,

- and submit our lives to God's authority,
- because of what God has already done for us.

So far in this chapter we have seen the glories of God's grace to us in Christ.

- He called us to believe in Christ,
- and he united us with Christ.

We died with Christ.

- The old person we used to be,
- stuck in bondage to sin,
- was crucified with him.

We rose with Christ.

- One day we will rise physically,
- but right now we walk in newness of life,
- supplied with the power of his Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we are people who have been brought from death to life!

And this is God's doing!

And the more we savor the truth of his gracious work in our lives,

- the more we will find our resolve strengthened to fight sin,
- and to honor him.

Think about Lazarus.

- If you don't know the story, Lazarus was a friend of Jesus who died,
- And after four days Jesus came and raised him from the dead.

How do you think Lazarus spent his time after Jesus called him out of the tomb, and brought him back to life?

My guess is that at first,

- he was completely consumed with the awe of what Jesus had done
- and gratitude for God's grace.

And in those days,

- any temptation to sin probably felt pretty weak,
- because he was basking in the fact that the Lord had raised him from the dead!

And yet, as time went by,

- and the initial experience wore off,
- even Lazarus would have struggled again.

But surely when he remembered what happened to him,

- and savored that grace,
- he would have found fresh resolve to honor his Savior with the new life he had received.

The initial days of our Christian lives...

- and the mountain top experiences we sometimes have...
- they are wonderful!

Temptation loses power as we delight in the sweetness of God's grace.

But time goes on,

- feelings fade,
- and the struggles resume.

So, we need ways of remembering that in Christ we have been brought from death to life.

That's why we gather every week to sing, pray, read, and preach the Word of Christ.

- That's why we come around the Lord's table once a month.
- That's why we meet in LIFE Groups to encourage one another with these things.

Because we need to savor God's grace,

- so that we might stand in fresh amazement of all he has done,
- and find fresh resolve in the fight against sin.

These are tactics for the fight.

- Reject sin's authority
- Resist sin's appeal
- Refuse to serve sin
- Submit to God's authority
- Savor God's grace
- And sixth...

6. Serve God

Look at verse 13 one more time: *Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

As God's people, in Christ, we are called to submit to his authority,

- savor his grace,
- and then spend our days, giving the whole of our lives to glorify him.

And friends, there's no higher purpose than that.

- There's no greater privilege than that.
- There's no greater goal in life than to glorify God.

The White House staff will often say,

- "I serve at the pleasure of the President."
- And they say that with great pride!

Well, we get to say,

- "We serve at the pleasure of God."
- What could better?

Again, living as a Christian is not simply about all the things we must avoid.

- If that's your impression of Christianity you're missing something massive.
- Living as a Christian is really about all the things we get to do!

We get to serve God!

We get to take our members...

- our minds, our bodies, our words and all our faculties...
- and present them to the Lord of the universe and say,
- "what do you want to do with these?"

And he does not dismiss us because of our weakness, saying,

- "I can't do anything with that!"
- No, he uses us for his good purposes!

He can take your mind,

- that was once full of greed and coveting,
- and fill it up with creative plans for generosity.

He can take your heart,

- that was once trapped in lust,
- and fill it up with love.

He can take your mouth,

- that once poured out slander,
- and use it instead to pour out encouragement.

He can take your members,

- and transform them into instruments of righteousness,
- as you present yourself to him!

This is the way to fight sin.

It's not only a negative resolve to reject sin's authority,

- resist sin's appeal,
- and refuse to serve sin.

It's also a positive resolve to submit to God's authority,

- savor God's grace,
- and serve him.

When temptation comes this week,

- employ these tactics,
- and by God's strength you will find help for the fight.

Conclusion

Now, as we close, we need to see what Paul says in verse 14.

He's rattled off some crucial commands,

- he's called us to engage the fight against sin,
- and now he tells us once again why we can do this with absolute confidence.

Look at verse 14: *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

It's so important that we see hear this verse for what it is.

- This verse is not a command.
- This verse is a promise.

Christian, God is promising that, "Sin will have no dominion over you."

How can he say that?

- We know our weakness.
- We know our struggles.

He can say that because, you are in Christ.

And in Christ, you are not living under the condemnation of a law that you have not obeyed.

Instead, you are living under the pardon of a Lord

- who paid your penalty,
- when he died in your place.

And in Christ, you are not living under the demands of a law you do not have the power to keep.

Instead, you are living under the authority of a Lord

- Who supplies you with his own power,
- Through his own Spirit,
- That you might walk in obedience to him.

Both the pardon for sin *and* the power to obey are gifts of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus.

And in Christ, you have this wonderful hope: That one day, he will return.

And when he does,

- He will remove you from the presence of sin entirely.
- And the battle will be fully and forever won.

That is why sin will have no dominion over you.

- Because Christ is your Lord and Christ is your Savior,
- and you are united to him both now and forever.

If you are feeling weighed down by the guilt of sin today,

- if you are feeling powerless in the battle against sin today,
- trust in Jesus.

He has pardon,

- and he has power,
- for all who belong to him.

So, shall we continue in sin?

- By no means.
- We must stop it.

We must.

- And we can.
- Because we are united to Christ.

Believe that with all your heart and then fight with all your might.

Let's pray.

“Pursuing”
Romans 6:15-19
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 8/22/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans chapter 6. This morning we are continuing our time in Romans 5 and 6, exploring the doctrine of union with Christ.

Next week will be our last week in this series, and want you to know I have really enjoyed walking through these chapters with you, and I’m so glad to have heard from many of you that this has been helpful and encouraging. Praise God!

For anyone who would like to continue exploring this wonderful doctrine together, I want to let you know that I will be leading a 6-week LIFE Group study on Union with Christ this fall. We’ll meet on Thursday nights here at church beginning September 16.

It will be a mixture of teaching, discussion, and prayer. I’d love to have you there. You can find details and sign up at the church website.

Here’s the definition of union with Christ we’re using in this series: **Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

That definition is simply a summary of what we are seeing in Romans 5 and 6.

We’ve seen that union with Christ has to do with our identity as believers.

- We were once “in Adam,” ruined by his failure in the garden.
- We are now “in Christ,” redeemed by his victory on the cross.

When we become a Christians our entire position changes.

- And since our position has changed,
- our experience begins to change as well.

We become so identified with Christ that it is actually possible to say,

- What happened to him has happened to us.
- We have died with him, and we have risen with him.

Our old life in bondage to sin is over.

- Our new life in service to God has begun.
- And our responsibility is to act accordingly,
- with all the strength that he supplies.

This is the primary emphasis of Romans 6:

- We are to fight against sin.
- We are to pursue righteousness.

In light of our union with Christ

And Romans 6:15-19 focuses on this crucial pursuit of a righteous life.

Now, someone might want to ask, “Wait a second, we have to pursue righteousness? I thought we receive our righteous standing before God by faith alone?”

That’s correct! Our righteous standing before God becomes ours,

- by faith in Christ alone,
- and not by any work or any effort on our part.

That is the doctrine of justification.

- But, in the verses we’re looking at today,
- Paul is dealing with the doctrine of sanctification.

And here’s the difference:

- Justification describes our righteous standing,
- Sanctification describes our righteous living.

In the moment we believe,

- God gives us a righteous standing.
- That’s justification.

Then, over the course of our lives,

- God grows us in righteous living.
- That’s sanctification.

And while justification requires no work or effort on our part, sanctification does.

The Bible calls us to flee from sin,

- to strive for holiness,
- to pursue righteousness.

And today I want to answer two questions:

1. Why is the pursuit of righteousness necessary?
2. How is the pursuit of righteousness possible?

Let’s start with the why...

1. Why is the pursuit of righteousness necessary?

I remember taking a taxi back from O’Hare a few years ago and striking up a conversation with the driver who happened to be a Muslim.

He found out that I was a Christian,

- we started talking about our different beliefs,
- and do you know what his number one objection was to the Christian faith?

It wasn't the divinity of Jesus...

It wasn't the authority of the Bible...

He said, "My biggest issue with Christianity is that you're all so sinful, and since you believe God will forgive you no matter what you've done, you don't seem to care about the way you live."

Now, how do we respond to that?

Well, he was right about two things:

- We are so sinful!
- And we do believe that God will forgive us!

But here's where he was wrong: We absolutely care about the way we live.

Someone could ask, If God is as gracious as the Bible says he is,

- Why work hard to fight sin?
- Why trouble ourselves with the pursuit of a righteous life?

And that is the exact question Paul is addressing in Romans 6.

- In verse 1 he asked, *Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*
- Again in verse 15 he asks again, *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*

And in both places his answer is exactly the same:

- *By no means!*
- And notice why...

Verse 16: Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Do you see what that says?

- We cannot freely and willfully continue in sin.
- Because that would mean voluntarily giving ourselves over as slaves to sin.

In ancient Rome, slavery was widespread.

- And while it was often unjust and cruel,
- It was not exactly like the slavery we are most familiar with.

And one key difference has to do with how a person ended up in slavery.

- One of the horrors of American slavery was that people were captured against their will and forced to serve as slaves.
- This great evil certainly happened in the ancient world, but it was not always the case.

In Paul's day, a person who fell into financial hardship might present himself to a master as a slave.

- He would then serve his master and earn wages
- until he was able to purchase his freedom once again.

Slavery in the Roman Empire,

- while always tragic,
- was sometimes voluntary.

And it is this picture of voluntary slavery that Paul calls to mind in verse 16.

- If we *present ourselves* to anyone as slaves...
- Then we are slaves of the one we serve.

And this verse says all of us will either serve sin or obedience.

- There's no middle position.
- We have to choose one or the other.
- And that choice has massive implications.

Slavery to sin leads to death.

- Not only physical death.
- But spiritual death as well.

But on the other hand, slavery to obedience leads to righteousness.

- And in verse 19 we see that righteousness leads to sanctification.
- And in verse 22 we see that sanctification leads to eternal life.

The choice between serving sin or serving obedience is a choice between life and death!

And that is why we really do care about the way we live!

We cannot say, "God is gracious! God will forgive us! So, we can sin freely..."

Because we know that if we present ourselves to sin,

- We are slaves to sin.
- And we are headed toward tragedy.

But if we present ourselves to obedience,

- Then we are a slave to obedience.
- And we are headed toward glory.

Romans 6:16 makes it clear that we must pursue rightlessness.

- Because the only alternative is slavery to sin.
- This is a matter of life and death.

Next question...

2. How is the pursuit of righteousness possible?

I am so thankful that Paul does not stop at verse 16.

If the passage ended here the message would be:

- You must either serve sin, which leads to death.
- Or you must serve righteousness, which leads to life.
- So, serve righteousness!

That would a true statement,

- but it would not be very good news,
- not for any of us who are honest about our weaknesses.

We know that our hearts are prone to wander.

- We know that our commitments are often weak.
- We know that our behavior tends to waver.

So, if the pursuit of righteousness is entirely dependent upon us,

- We are not going to get very far.
- And that is why we must thank God for verses 17-19!

Notice that is exactly how Paul starts verse 17.

He says, *Thanks be to God...*

And he goes on to describe what God has done to enable our pursuit of righteousness.

We're not left on our own!

- The pursuit of righteousness is possible
- because of God's gracious work in our lives!

And Paul highlights three aspects of this work in these verses:

1. God has given us new hearts.
2. God has committed us to a new standard.
3. God has freed us for a new purpose.

Let's consider each of those one at a time. First...

God has given us new hearts

Look at verse 17: *Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart...*

Paul reminds us that none of us were ever in a position of neutrality,

- with the freedom to decide whether we would serve sin or righteousness,
- we were all once slaves of sin.

Because of Adam's rebellion,

- and our relation to him,
- we were all ruled by sin from birth.

But, God brought us into a new relationship with Christ,

- We are "in him" now,
- Ruled by his transforming grace.

And in this new position,

- God not only gives us forgiveness for the ways we've sinned against him,
- he gives us new hearts that desire to serve him.

Thanks be to God, Paul says, that you... have become obedient from the heart.

Our hearts used to be hardened in sin.

- We were neither willing nor able to serve God.
- But he intervened, and changed us, just as he promised he would.

He promised this all the way back in Ezekiel 36 verses 26-27.

In that passage God says, *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

God promised to give his people a new heart with new affections for him.

- God promised to give his people a new Spirit with new power to obey him.
- And in Christ, God kept his word.

God takes us and makes us obedient from the heart!

As Christians, we obey God because we actually want to.

Some people have the impression that the Christian life is all about suppressing desires.

- They think following Jesus is a kind of self-inflicted misery in this life,
- With all our joy deferred until the life to come.

But that's wrong!

- We have become obedient from the heart!
- We have new desires that we delight to pursue!

There was a time in my life when drinking coffee would have been a self-inflicted misery.

But something changed.

- And now I wake up in the morning and smell that freshly brewed pot with delight!
- I've got a new desire.

And the Christian life is full of new desires.

Think about it.

- Why do you want to be here today worshipping with his people?
- Why do you want to read the Bible and obey what it says?
- Why do you want to pray?
- Why do you want to give your time and your gifts to advance the kingdom of Christ?
- Why do you want to tell others about Jesus?

Sure, your motives are mixed,

- and your motivation seems to wax and wane,
- but the desire is there.

How did it get there?

- God put it there.
- He changed your heart.

Now, perhaps you're thinking, "But I don't want to do any of those things. I don't have any of those desires."

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm here today out of some sense of obligation,

- I rarely read my Bible or pray because I'd almost always rather do something else,
- I'm not interested in giving or serving or telling others about Jesus."

"In fact, I don't find that my heart is drawn toward righteousness at all."

Do you see how this is such good news for you?

- God is not telling you to look within and will yourself into obedience.
- He is telling you, "I can give you a new heart."

Ask him to do that!

Go to him today and tell him honestly,

- I don't feel any desire to honor you.
- Forgive my sin!
- Change my heart!

He will answer that prayer.

Or, maybe you're thinking, "I do desire to obey God, but my desire is weak."

Well, if God can give you a new heart,

- he can certainly strengthen your new heart as well.
- So ask him to do that.

Go to him today and tell him honestly,

- I don't desire to honor you enough.
- Forgive me.
- And strengthen me.

He will answer that prayer too.

The pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has given us new hearts.

And, the pursuit of righteousness is possible because...

God has committed us to a new standard

Look at verse 17 again: *Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

If you're going to pursue righteousness,

- if you're going to walk in obedience to the Lord,
- you need to know what the Lord requires.

The Christian life involves a particular standard of teaching.

There is essential,

- non-negotiable,
- truth for us to believe and to follow.

And God has revealed this to us in his Word.

- *All Scripture is profitable for teaching... and for training in righteousness.*
- Scripture is the standard.

As followers of Jesus, we are committed to believing all that the Bible promises and obeying all that the Bible commands.

And this commitment,

- like the new heart,
- is also a gift of God's grace.

Look closely at verse 17 again.

Paul does not say "You have become obedient to the standard of teaching to which you committed yourself."

Paul says, *You... have become obedient... to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

It's a passive statement.

Listen to the different ways a couple other English translations put this.

The Christian Standard Bible says, *You obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over.*

The NIV says, *You have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.*

You did not commit yourself. Someone else committed you.

You did not hand yourself over. Someone else took hold of you.

You did not give your allegiance. Someone else claimed you.

Who did this? God did!

Christian, you were once a captive to sin,

- but God set you free in Jesus Christ,
- and he laid claim to your life.

Whatever commitment you have to God exists because of God's commitment to you.

And his commitment did not end at your conversion.

- He is in the process of transforming your life according to his standard.
- He is conforming you to the pattern of righteousness revealed in his Word.

Think of a mold used to shape and fashion metal.

In college, we were all required to take at least one art class.

- And I remember scrolling through the list of options
- and picking a class that was simply called "metals."

I had no idea what we would do in that class,

- but it sounded appealing,
- and I wasn't the only guy who thought so.

It was basically all men who signed up for "metals" class that semester,

- and we all shared the same surprise when we discovered on day one that the class could have been more accurately called "jewelry making,"
- since that's all we were going to do.

I think we had all imagined we'd be welding.

- Instead, we were making rings!
- But, we made the most of it.

We made molds,

- we melted silver,
- and we poured it in.

And soon those lumps of silver were formed and fashioned into the image we had designed.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

- this is what God is doing to us.
- He is forming us and fashioning us into his image.

He has committed our lives to his standard.

- He is conforming us into the pattern of righteousness found in his Word.
- A pattern seen most clearly in Christ.

God has united us to him.

- God is conforming us into Christ's image.
- Christ is the mold!

Ephesians 4:13 says that God is growing us into *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.

God has begun a process of making us like Jesus, and he will finish what he has started.

God is not going to discard you.

- He is not going to leave you incomplete.
- He is going to shape your life into the standard of his righteousness.

He will do it partially in this life and he will do it perfectly in the life to come.

Thanks be to God!

The pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has given us new hearts.

- And God has committed us to a new standard.
- And third...

God has freed us for a new purpose

Look at verse 18: *Thanks be to God, that you... having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

In Christ, God has set us free from sin.

But God did not free us so that we could live a life of unfettered, personal autonomy.

- He didn't release us from slavery so that we could serve ourselves.
- He released us from slavery so that we would serve him.

This is fundamental to our identity as believers.

- This is how Paul saw himself.
- In Romans 1:1 he introduces himself as *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.*

That word "servant" is the same word he uses in 6:18.

- It means slave.
- Paul says, "I am a slave of Christ."
- And so are all who follow him.

Now, Paul also knew that this illustration of slavery had its drawbacks.

That's why he says in verse 19: *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.*

He's saying, "I'm using an imperfect illustration from our world to help you understand this great spiritual reality."

As God's people we belong to him like slaves belong to a master.

- We are bound to obey him,
- and we are committed to his standards.

That's what makes the Christian life a kind of slavery.

But here's how it's different from all the slavery you know:

- We obey God from the heart!
- We know that God's standards are all just and good!

And therefore, we are willing slaves,

- joyful slaves,
- gladly submitting to the King of the Universe.

This is our new purpose: In response to all the grace he has shown us,

- and with all the strength that he provides us,
- we pursue righteousness.

Look at verse 19: *For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

We used to serve sin.

- We used to present our members to impurity and lawlessness.
- We used to give our bodies, our minds, our will, to the power of darkness.

But no more.

God has changed our hearts.

- We desire to obey him.
- We delight in honoring him.

And he has committed our lives to his standard.

- He has shown us the paths of righteousness
- in the truth of his Word.

So, we are called to take all our members,

- all our faculties,
- and offer them up daily in service to him.

We are called to honor him

- in the way we use our bodies,
- in the way we fill our minds,
- in the way we direct our will.

Christian, God is calling you to do that!

- He is not calling you to passivity.
- He is calling you to actively pursue righteousness in light of all that he has done.

And this pursuit, Paul says, *leads to sanctification.*

Here we see that crucial difference between justification and sanctification again.

There is nothing we could ever do that would lead to our justification.

- There is nothing we could ever do that would lead to our righteous standing.
- We are justified by faith.

But there is something we must do that leads to our sanctification.

- There is something we must do that leads to our righteous living.
- We are sanctified by effort.

And yet, we must always remember that the faith that justifies, and the effort that sanctifies, are both gifts of God's grace.

We had hearts of stone, but God gave us hearts that long to obey.

- We were captive to sin, but God committed us to the standard of his Word.
- We gave ourselves to impurity and lawlessness, but God made us slaves of righteousness.

So, we are called to exert real effort in the pursuit,

- But thanks be to God!
- He has made this pursuit possible by his grace.

Conclusion

Now, as we close, let's remember where God's grace comes from...

God's grace,

- along with every spiritual blessing,
- comes to us in Christ Jesus.

When God saves us he unites us with Christ

- and this not only changes our position,
- it changes our experience.

Remember, Romans 6:11:

- In Christ, we are dead to sin.
- In Christ, we are alive to God.

Our old life in bondage to sin is over.

- So we fight sin with confidence,
- Knowing that it can never take us captive again.

And our new life in service to God has begun.

- So we pursue righteousness with confidence,
- Knowing all the ways God has enabled and empowered us.

And we do this with the unshakable hope that when Christ returns or calls us home

- The battle with sin will be fully and forever won,
- And the pursuit of righteousness will be perfectly complete.

Romans 8:29 says that it is God's intent to conform us to the image of his Son.

- That is God's plan for our lives.
- And that is God's promise for our lives.

He will sanctify us in this life, and he will glorify us in the life to come.

In Christ,

- righteous living is not only possible,
- it's guaranteed.

Do you remember those Men's Warehouse commercials?

- They'd show off their suits or whatever else they were trying to sell,
- and then the owner would say, "You're gonna like the way you look. I guarantee it."

He invited customers into his store,

- Guaranteeing that when they came,
- The result would be good.

Well, here's a better invitation:

God calls us into Christ,

- Guaranteeing that when we come,
- The result will be glorious.

Believe in him.

- Entrust your life to him.
- And press on in the pursuit of righteousness.

This pursuit is necessary!

- This pursuit is possible!
- And this pursuit is guaranteed to culminate in glory for all who are in Christ Jesus!

Let's pray.

“Enjoyed Forever”
Romans 6:20-23
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 8/29/21

Introduction

Let’s keep our Bibles open right there at Romans 6.

- This is our final week in our series in Romans 5 and 6,
- a series that I hope has helped us understand more clearly and appreciate more fully our union with Christ.

I have really enjoyed walking through these chapters with you. Many of you have let me know that this has been helpful and encouraging to you, and I am thanking God for that.

For anyone who would like to continue exploring this wonderful doctrine together, I want to let you know that I will be leading a 6-week LIFE Group study on Union with Christ this fall. We’ll meet on Thursday nights here at church beginning September 16.

It will be a mixture of teaching, discussion, and prayer. I’d love to have you there. You can find details and sign up at the church website.

Now, here’s the definition of union with Christ that we’ve been unpacking in this series:

Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

That is basically a summary statement of what we find about this doctrine in Romans 5 and 6,

- and in our passage today we come to the final part of that statement,
- as we see that our union with Christ is never going to end.

It is a union that we will enjoy forever.

Eternal life is the culmination of the transformation

- that God works in us
- when he brings us into Christ.

In this series we have seen that believers in Christ experience a great transformation.

Some people think that becoming a Christian simply means adding something to your life.

- They think it basically means adding a new relationship with Jesus,
- and adding a new set of responsibilities to Jesus.

And becoming a Christian does mean adding a new relationship and a new responsibility.

But it is a mistake to think that Christianity is simply an addition to our lives.

Becoming a Christian is a complete transformation of our lives!

It's not like putting an addition onto a house.

- It's like tearing a house down
- and replacing it with something entirely new.

Becoming a Christian involves dying.

- In Romans 6:5 we read that we *have been united with [Christ] in a death like his.*
- And verse 6 that *our old self was crucified with him.*

Becoming a Christian involves rising.

- In Romans 6:5 we read that *we shall certainly be united with [Christ] in a resurrection like his.*
- And verse 8 says *we... live with him.*

Becoming a Christian involves the end of an old life and the beginning of a new.

- It is not simply an addition.
- It is a transformation.

And the passage we're looking at today drives this truth home.

Romans 6:20-23 describes the contrast between our former lives apart from Christ and our new lives in union with Christ.

There are four descriptions here of the transformation that occurs in every believer's life.

- I want you to see these four descriptions,
- And I want you to see how much hope and joy they provide both now and forever.

This is fundamental to our identity as believers.

- God has changed us,
- here's how:

First...

1. We were slaves, but now we are free

Verse 20 says, *You were slaves of sin...*

That is a universal statement about every human being born into this world.

- We are not born in freedom,
- we are born in slavery.

When Adam rebelled in the garden,

- the power of sin was unleashed into the creation,
- corrupting everything,
- including us.

Romans 5 and 6 depict sin as a tyrannical power,

- reigning over fallen humanity,
- producing all kinds of evil in us.

We are born corrupt.

- Sin rules over us from the very beginning of our lives.
- And we all experience its power.

Picture a plant with sharp thorns and poisonous fruit.

- When that plant first sprang up out of the ground it probably looked harmless,
- but over time it's true nature was revealed.

That's us. We may look very sweet and innocent when we are little, but as we grow our true nature reveals itself.

If you've raised children, you've watched this happen before your eyes.

- You have to teach your kids all kinds of things,
- but you don't need to teach them to sin.

You don't need to give your kid lessons on how to be selfish,

- or how to burst out in anger,
- or how to lie.

Sin comes naturally because sin is in our nature.

We're stuck in it,

- slaves to it,
- from the moment we come into this world.

And we are helpless to get ourselves out of this captivity.

We need someone else,

- someone with more power than sin,
- to come and set us free.

And this is what God does for us in Christ.

You were slaves of sin... But now... verse 22: you have been set free from sin.

God has planned and executed the greatest act of liberation that anyone will ever know.

He sent his Son

- into this world
- to set his people free from sin.

And here's how he does it:

Through his death, Jesus frees us from sin's penalty.

When we measure our lives by the standard of God's Word, we all fall short.

God is a just judge.

- He will not let any sin go unpunished.
- And we all stand condemned before him on our own.

But God made a way to maintain his justice

- And to pardon his people:
- He gave his Son.

On the cross, Jesus offered up his life as the sufficient sacrifice for our sin,

- taking the punishment we deserve,
- setting us free from sin's penalty.

But that's not all: through his resurrection, Jesus also frees us from sin's power.

Picture a massive medieval castle.

- And inside this castle,
- in the deepest, darkest corner is the dungeon full of captives.

And one day a new prisoner is tossed into the dungeon with the others.

- He's beaten.
- He's bloody.
- He looks dead.

But then, to everyone's astonishment, he gets up.

- He looks at those with him in the dungeon and tells them, "Follow me."
- Then he kicks open the doors and leads them safely out of the castle.

That's the resurrection.

Jesus entered into death,

- but he rose again,
- and he leads a host of captives with him.

When you came to faith in Christ you followed him out of the dungeon.

- You are no longer sin's captive,
- you are free.

This is the basis for our confidence in the fight against sin as believers.

When sin tempts us...

- When sin makes demands of us...
- We can actually say, "no!"

We can tell sin,

- "You are not my captor anymore."
- "You do not own me anymore."
- I belong to Christ!

And on that basis,

- we can resist sin!
- And we must resist!

In verse 1 Paul asks, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound?"

- And his answer is emphatic:
- By no means!
- Absolutely not!

Our old life stuck in sin is over.

- Our new life in Christ has begun.
- Now, we must act accordingly.

And even though none of us fight sin perfectly, we can fight sin confidently...

- Because our position in Christ will never change.
- We are safe and secure in him.

Even when sin trips us up...

- Even when we stumble and fall...
- We can stand up again, dust ourselves off, and keep going.

Because Jesus frees us from sin's penalty through his death,

- he frees us from sin's power through his resurrection,
- *and*, one day, he will free us from sin's presence at his return.

Christ will come again.

- When he does our battle with sin will be finished.
- And we will enjoy our freedom in him forever.

Praise God!

- We were slaves,
- but now we are free.

That's the first description of the transformation believers in Christ experience.

Here's the second...

2. We were free, but now we are slaves

Yes, you heard that right.

- That not a contradicting statement to the first description,
- it's a very important complementary statement.

Look at verse 20.

- Paul says that while you and I were slaves to sin,
- *you were free in regard to righteousness...*

Before we came to faith in Christ,

- we had a certain kind of freedom,
- we were free "in regard to righteousness."

Our lives were not ruled by God's righteous standards,

- we were not concerned with following his commands,
- we were free in this sense from his reign.

But, as Calvin says, that is a wretched liberty.

- Living far from God is not a blessing,
- it's a curse.

This is illustrated perfectly in Jesus's story of the prodigal son.

- This young man was richly blessed in his father's house,
- but he decided he wanted to be free.

So, he took his inheritance,

- left his father,
- and set off on his own.

He had his freedom,

- and for a time he had his fun,
- but it landed him in an absolute mess.

Before long he is poor, pitiable, and so hungry that he longs to eat the slop given to the pigs.

He got his liberty,

- but it was wretched.
- And that is where a life of “freedom in regard to righteousness” leads us.

Sin has its pleasures, but they are fleeting.

Freedom from God leads to disaster in the end.

And Paul says,

- that was our story,
- that was our life before Christ.

But now... verse 22, you... have become slaves of God.

Here’s the transformation!

- We were free from God,
- now we have become slaves of God.

And if freedom from God was a wretched liberty, slavery to God is a glorious bondage.

Think about the prodigal son again.

He comes to his senses,

- he sees the foolishness of his decision to leave his father,
- and so he goes back.

He comes with his head bowed in shame,

- ready to take the lowest position of service in his father’s house,
- but his father comes running to meet him with joy.

The father covers the son with his robe,

- and blesses him with his riches,
- and welcomes him into his home.

The son is under the authority of his father once again, and it is the greatest blessing of his life!

And friends, when God opens our eyes to see the foolishness of life apart from him,

- and we come to him in repentance and faith,
- he receives us with joy.

He covers us with the robes of Christ’s righteousness,

- he blesses us with the riches of his grace,
- and he welcomes us home.

We come under the authority of our Heavenly Father,

- and yes, we are bound to him.
- but this is a glorious bondage.

Because everything he commands is for our good!

- His rules are true and righteous altogether.
- They are more desirable than gold.
- They are sweeter than honey.

Serving him is the great blessing of our lives!

And that is why, as believers in Christ,

- We not only fight sin,
- We pursue righteousness.

As slaves to God, we seek to live in a way that is honoring to him.

- And sometimes that requires great sacrifice.
- Sometimes that is met with great resistance.

There is a cost that comes as we follow Christ.

- There is a cross to bear.
- Jesus never promised that following him would be easy.

In fact, he said the world would hate us.

- He said we would have trouble.
- He said that the journey into the kingdom of God is marked with many tribulations.

But the journey is worth it!

- Because, while freedom from God leads to disaster in the end.
- Slavery to God leads to glory in the end.

So, we serve God now,

- Because we know that one day, we will hear him say,
- “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.”

We know that the blessing of serving God will infinitely outweigh any of the cost.

We were slaves to sin, but now we are free.

- We were free in regard to righteousness, but now we are slaves to God.
- And...

3. We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful

Look at verse 21: *What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*

The question is, “When you were a slave to sin,

- when you were free from righteousness,
- what fruit were you getting at that time?”

The implied answer is none.

When Paul writes about “fruit” in his letters it is always something positive,

- it is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5,
- the fruit of righteousness in Philippians 1.

By “fruit” he means qualities of godliness.

- And before we knew Christ, we had none of this.
- In fact, all we had was reason to feel ashamed.

Do you see that in verse 21?

He mentions “the things of which you are now ashamed.”

- And he knew what that was like.
- Paul wrote honestly about his pre-Christian life, and you can sense his shame.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he writes, *I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

1 Timothy 1:13 he writes, *I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.*

And many of us can look back on our lives before Christ and feel ashamed.

- Some look back and see a lifestyle of rebellion and offense against God.
- Others look back and see a pursuit of self-righteousness no better than filthy rags.

Whatever our particular story,

- apart from Christ,
- we were fruitless.

We were not practicing every possible evil.

- Our lives may have even looked good by many people’s standards.
- But we were not producing any of the fruit that pleases God.

And had we remained this way,

- Paul says in verse 21,
- it would have ended in death.

But now... Verse 22... the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Now, like branches connected to a vine,

- we are united to Christ,
- and we bear fruit!

Godly character begins to grow where it did not grow before.

- And this leads to sanctification,
- to growth in holiness,
- which culminates in eternal life.

We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful.

Earlier in the summer, there was a little corner of our backyard that was supposed to be our garden.

But the only thing we managed to grow in that corner was a ton of weeds.

We didn't till the soil,

- we scattered some seeds, but not properly,
- and we basically let the garden go...

And so, if you come to our house

- And if you go to our "garden" looking for fruits or vegetables,
- You are not going to find anything.

But, if you walk 50 feet into our neighbor's yard, you'll find something completely different.

Last fall, my neighbor built this big, elevated, garden box.

And this spring he filled it with good soil,

- he planted his seeds in nice little rows,
- he even installed a motion-sensor sprinkler to keep birds and squirrels away.

It's amazing.

- It's turned into a miniature farm!
- He's harvesting all kinds of things in there!

My "garden" is fruitless. His is fruitful.

That's the difference between life apart from Christ and life in Christ.

If you let yourself go,

- if you live in freedom from righteousness,
- you will be fruitless.

But if you will give yourself to Christ,

- if you will live in submission and service to him,
- you will bear fruit.

This is why you can pursue righteousness with confidence!

Because Christ is like a vine,

- and we are like branches,
- and in him we will bear fruit!

If you are in Christ, God will work in you with diligence and purpose,

- the way my neighbor works in his garden,
- and he will produce all kinds of righteousness in you.

Your life will become a harvest of holiness.

- You will make progress.
- You will be fruitful.

This is the transformation that occurs in every believer's life.

- We were slaves, but now we are free
- We were free, but now we are slaves
- We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful

And lastly...

4. We were earning a wage, but now we are enjoying a gift.

We come now to the crescendo of Romans 6,

- Paul puts everything together in this single summary sentence.
- *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Consider that first statement: *The wages of sin is death.*

Sin promises life but it only brings death.

We see this from the beginning of the Bible.

- Adam and Eve were tempted with the lie that rebellion against God would bring blessing,
- but what followed was a curse.

And ever since, humanity has been living under the curse of sin,

- adding to Adam's guilt with rebellion of our own,
- and earning God's just condemnation as a result.

Notice that verse 23 says, ***the wages** of sin is death.*

We earn what sin pays us. And that payment is death.

This death is physical,

- and even worse,
- this death is spiritual.

In verse 23, Paul contrasts death with eternal life.

- He is referring to eternal death.
- He is referring to hell.

And he says this is the wage we earn for our service to sin.

- This is the payment we receive for our rebellion against God.
- There will not be a single person in hell who does not deserve to be there.

The wages of sin is death...

But!

That is one of the greatest words in the Bible isn't it?

- We were slaves to sin, **but** we have been set free...
- We were free in regard to righteousness, **but** we have become slaves of God...
- We were fruitless, **but** we have become fruitful...

And *the wages of sin is death, **but** the free gift of God is eternal life.*

Now, look closely at this verse. The precise words matter!

It does not say,

- “The wages of sin is death,
- but the wages of God is eternal life.”

The point is not, “You can earn death. Or, you can earn life.”

If that were the message of the Bible,

- none of us would ever enter eternal life,
- because none of us could ever earn eternal life.

But in his grace,

- God offers us what we do not deserve,
- he offers us eternal life as a gift.

So, there will not be a single person in hell who does not deserve to be there.

And, there will not be a single person in heaven who does deserve to be there.

Eternal death is a wage we earn.

- Eternal life is a gift we receive.
- And it is a gift we can enjoy right now.

Eternal life is not only a future life with God in the new world.

- Eternal life is also a present life with God in this world.
- A life of knowing him and walking with him.

Listen to Jesus's words from John 17:3. He says, *This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God.*

Eternal life is life spent with the knowledge of God.

- And for all who receive this gift,
- life with God is not only a future hope, it is a present reality.

It is like an engagement.

- An engaged couple knows that the full joy of their life together is still to come,
- but that does not stop them from real joy together leading up to their wedding day.

One day we will stand in the presence of our God.

- We will see him face to face.
- And our joy will be complete.

But even though eternal life will culminate later,

- for all who receive the gift of God,
- our eternal life of knowing and enjoying God starts now.

Conclusion

God does not simply add a few good things onto our lives, he completely transforms our lives.

- We were slaves to sin, but now we are free.
- We were free from righteousness, but now we are slaves to God.
- We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful.
- We were earning a wage, but now we are enjoying a gift.

And here's the last thing: Do you see where this gift is found?

Look at Romans 6:23 one more time, *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

The gift of God,

- all the grace of God,
- is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “Everything is from him, and without him there is nothing at all.”¹

And so, praise God for the doctrine of union with Christ!

When we come to faith in Christ,

- God unites us to Christ,
- and all that is found in him becomes ours.

“Everything is from him, and without him there is nothing at all.”

Which leads to this obvious and crucial application:

- Come to Christ!
- Believe in Christ!

If you’re feeling hopelessly stuck in bondage to sin,

- come to Christ!
- He has the power to set you free.

Believe in him.

- When you do, sin will have no dominion over you anymore.
- Instead, you will live under the rule of his glorious grace.

If you’re wondering how you can find the strength to live a life that is honoring to God,

- come to Christ!
- He will produce all kinds of fruit in you.

Believe in him.

- He will empower you for the fight against sin,
- And the pursuit of a righteous life.

If you’re afraid of death because you know what your sin has earned you,

- come to Christ!
- He is the source of eternal security.

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 310.

Believe in him.

- He will hold you fast in this life,
- And he will bring you safely into the life to come.

If you're longing to know and enjoy God, come to Christ! Believe in him!

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

- And he offers himself to you today.
- Entrust yourself to him.

Enter into this glorious union with Christ by faith.

- Experience the transforming power of this union day by day.
- And enjoy the unshakable hope of knowing that this union will never ever end.

Let's pray.

APPENDIX 6
LIFE GROUP STUDY

The goal of this Life Group study was to teach the doctrine of union with Christ, covering the same ground as the sermon series but providing some additional content and space for questions, discussion, and prayer

Union with Christ Life Group
Session 1: Defining Union with Christ
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 9/16/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Good evening everyone!

- Welcome to this 6-week LIFE Group study on the doctrine of Union with Christ.
- I've been looking forward to this for a long time.

As most of you know, this study is a part of a doctoral project I'm working to complete.

- So, thank you for taking the survey before tonight,
- and thank you in advance for taking that survey again once we complete our study!

If you missed that email with the link to the survey,

- or if you have not had a chance to complete it,
- please do that before we meet next time.
- Thanks!

The degree I'm working on is a Doctor of Ministry in New Testament Exposition from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Lord willing, I should be finished and graduating in May.

My overarching goal in pursuing this degree is simply to grow as a preacher.

But, I also hoped this time of study would help me answer a question that had been nagging me for some time: "What is union with Christ?"

That question actually goes back to my days as the Pastor of Student Ministries here.

- For those of you who don't know,
- I served in that role from 2012-2017 and I absolutely loved it.

In 2013, we were on our annual spring break trip to Florida with our high school students.

- It was a week to hang out on the beach,
- have a ton of fun,
- and read a solid Christian book together.

The book that year was *The Hole in our Holiness* by Kevin DeYoung.

- It's an excellent book that I'd recommend to all of you.
- And I'll never forget reading this sentence on page 94...

DeYoung writes, “Union with Christ may be the most important doctrine you’ve never heard of.”¹

I read that and I paused, put down the book, and thought, “I have no idea what that is.”

Here I was a pastor, a seminary student, and I did not know what DeYoung was talking about.

What is union with Christ?

Well, the rest of that section in DeYoung’s book was a helpful start in answering that question.

- And it set me on a journey of exploring this doctrine,
- and I’m really excited to share some of what I’ve been learning with you in our time together over these 6 weeks.

If you were here for my recent sermon series on “Union with Christ,”

- my hope is that this doesn’t simply feel like a repetition,
- but a reinforcement of what we covered in that series.

Here’s what our sessions each week are going to look like.

This is not a 90-minute lecture. This is a LIFE Group.

“LIFE” is an acronym that stands for leadership, intercessory prayer, fellowship around the word, and encouragement.

I’m your leader the next 6 weeks.

- And I’m going to teach,
- but we are going to take time to discuss the Word together,
- pray for one another,
- and encourage one another.

We’ll mix in opportunities for Q&A,

- discussion around our tables,
- and we’ll close the night each week with time for prayer.

So, let’s take a couple minutes right now to go around our tables and introduce ourselves.

Share your names and how long you’ve been at The Orchard.

[2-3 MINUTES FOR INTRODUCTIONS]

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 94.

Let's open our time now in prayer...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

In tonight's session we are going to define union with Christ. I want you to walk out of here with a one-sentence definition that I believe sums up the doctrine of union with Christ well. It's a definition we'll explore together in the next 5 sessions.

But, before we get to the "what" I want us to think about the "why"?

- Why does union with Christ matter?
- Why should we care about defining it and understanding it?

Kevin DeYoung says, it's "the most important doctrine you've probably never heard of," well what makes it so important?

Why does this matter?

- What difference will this make in your life?
- Why should you keep coming to this LIFE Group?

Let's start there.

Why does union with Christ matter?

Let me give you three reasons.

1. Union with Christ is the heart of our salvation

Now, I'm not saying you need to understand the doctrine of union with Christ in order to be saved!

Don't hear that!

But, I am saying that unless we understand the doctrine of union with Christ, we do not understand an essential truth about our salvation.

If we miss union with Christ, we're missing something crucial that God has done for us!

Here's how two different theologians put it:

First, John Calvin, who was a great 16th century reformer says, "We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and *we are separated from him*, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."²

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles,

According to Calvin, if we remain “separated from Christ,”

- we receive no benefit from Christ.
- Everything he did makes no difference for us.

Second, John Murray, who was a great 20th century professor says, “Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ... Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation... Apart from union with Christ we cannot view past, present, or future with anything but dismay and Christless dread.”³

According to Murray, if we don’t understand union with Christ,

- we don’t understand the central truth of our salvation,
- and apart from this union we have no hope.

Now those are bold statements,

- so the question we should ask next is,
- “are they biblical statements?”

Are Calvin and Murray correct when they assert the central importance of the doctrine of union with Christ?

Well, if you open your Bible app and type “union with Christ” into the search bar, do you know how many results you’ll pull up? Zero!

The phrase “union with Christ” does not appear a single time in the Bible.

- We get really close in Romans 6:5,
- which says we have been “united with him...”
- But that’s it!

So, how can a phrase that basically never appears in the Bible be so central and so important?

Well, a theological term does not need to appear in the Biblical text for it to be important.

- For example, you won’t find the word “Trinity” in the Bible,
- but that doesn’t mean we can toss that doctrine aside!

The word “Trinity” is a theological term that expresses a key Biblical reality.

- And so is the phrase “union with Christ.”
- The words may not appear in Scripture, but the doctrine sure does.

In fact, it’s so frequent and so pervasive that we often miss it.

(Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:537.

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 173–75.

Does anyone know what two little words express this doctrine again and again in the New Testament?

That's right. "In Christ."

That little phrase, or some variation of it like "in him" or "with him" appears hundreds of times in the New Testament, and it often refers to this doctrine of union with Christ.

Once you know this, you'll start to see it everywhere.

A couple years ago Kristen and I were shopping for a new car. And we began to set our sights on a Volkswagen SUV. Honestly, before we started researching, I didn't know Volkswagen made an SUV.

But once we started looking into the VW Atlas or Tiguan, we started to see them everywhere! We'd be driving down the road and one of us would point and say, "There's one!"

They were all around us, we just didn't notice until we started paying attention.

And you'll have the same experience as you start looking out for that little phrase, "in Christ."

For example, here are few highlights from the beginning of Ephesians.

*³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... ⁷ **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... ¹¹ **In him** we have obtained an inheritance... ¹³ **In him** you... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*

Think about what we learn from that brief passage!

Verse 3 says Every spiritual blessing we have comes from God "in Christ."

Verse 7 says Our redemption, our forgiveness, and all the grace we have is ours "in him."

Verse 11 says Our inheritance is secure "in him."

Verse 13 says We are sealed with the Holy Spirit "in him."

Even if we just had these verses, we would have good reason to agree with Calvin and Murray!

- Our whole salvation,
- every spiritual blessing,
- is ours "in Christ," in union with him.

Why does union with Christ matter? Union with Christ is the heart of our salvation.

2. Union with Christ is the link between justification and sanctification

We're going to spend the bulk of our time during this study in Romans 5:12-6:23.

This is a key passage on the doctrine of union with Christ in the New Testament, perhaps the most important passage on this topic.

And Romans 5:12-6:23 also emphasizes the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of sanctification.

Justification is the focus in Romans 5.

- For example, in verse 15 we read about *the free gift... [that] brought **justification**.*
- And in verse 18 we read about Christ's act of righteousness that *leads to **justification** and life.*

Justification is God's declaration that our guilt has been pardoned,

- our sins have been forgiven,
- and that we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

That's in Romans 5.

Then, by the end of Romans 6, Paul is talking about sanctification.

- For example, in verse 19 he says, *present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to **sanctification**.*
- And in verse 22 he says, *now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to **sanctification**.*

Again, justification is God's declaration that our guilt has been pardoned,

- our sins have been forgiven,
- and that we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

Sanctification is God's process of growing us in holiness,

- of helping us fight,
- so that we might become more like Jesus.

Justification describes our righteous standing.

Sanctification describes our righteous living.

And Paul wants us to see that Christians experience both.

Sanctification is not an optional extra in the Christian life.

- It's not a bonus.
- It's essential.

This is Paul's main argument in Romans 6.

In Romans 6:1 he says, *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*

Paul realized that he has magnified the riches of God's grace, and the free gift of justification, so much that someone might ask, "Hold on, if God is that gracious, and if there's nothing we do to earn our right standing before him, can we just sin freely knowing that he will show us mercy?"

And his answer is emphatic. Verse 2: *By no means!* Absolutely not!

Why not?

Verse 3: *[We] have been baptized into Christ Jesus.*

Verse 4: *We were buried with him...* and we walk in newness of life with him.

Verse 5: *We have been united with him.*

For Paul, our justification and our sanctification,

- our righteous standing and our righteous living,
- are inseparably linked together in our union with Christ.

Pastor Colin uses a great illustration to make this point.

He says God is a great gift giver,

- but we must not imagine him up in heaven saying to one person, "You get justification!"
- And to another person, "You get sanctification!"

No, God says, "You get Christ!"

- And all who receive him,
- all who are united to him,
- receive both justification *and* sanctification.

And in this study, we're going to see how the doctrine of union with Christ provides the means and all the motivation to fight sin and to pursue righteousness.

Why does union with Christ matter?

- Because it is the heart of our salvation.
- Because it is the link between justification and sanctification.

And third, because...

3. Union with Christ is the bedrock of assurance

Many Christians wrestle with assurance.

How can we know we are safe and secure for all of eternity?

There are several good ways to answer that question.

But here is the foundational answer: We can have assurance because we are united with Christ.

- When God brings a person into union with Christ,
- he does not let them out.

Listen to the hope and the confidence of these verses:

Romans 6:5: *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.*

Romans 6:8: *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If you are in Christ, you are safe, and you are secure.

Throughout this study, we're going to hear from one of my preaching heroes, Dr. Martyn-Lloyd Jones. Lloyd-Jones pastored Westminster Chapel in London in the 20th century. And from October 1957-April 1959 he preached 36 expositional sermons on Romans 5:12-6:23!

The sermons are a gold-mine of encouragement,

- and I'll be sharing quotes from them as we go,
- but here's Lloyd-Jones' summary on the confidence found in the doctrine of union with Christ.

He says, "Union with Christ... is one of the most glorious aspects of the Christian truth, one of the most profound, one of the most stimulating, one of the most comforting - indeed I rather like to use the word exhilarating. There is nothing, perhaps, in the whole range and realm of doctrine which, if properly grasped and understood, gives greater assurance, greater comfort, and greater hope than this doctrine of our union with Christ."⁴

I hope you'll feel the same way by the end of our study.

Union with Christ matters because it is the heart of our salvation.

Union with Christ matters because it is the link between justification and sanctification.

Union with Christ matters because it is the bedrock of assurance.

If you want to see the glory of God's grace more clearly...

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 30.

If you want to fight sin more confidently...
If you want to rest in assurance more completely...

Then you will benefit from this study on Union with Christ.

We're going to break for discussion now, but before we do, does anyone have a question about anything we've just covered?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. Before this study, what did you know about the doctrine of union with Christ?
2. What are you most curious to learn about this doctrine?
3. As a group read through Ephesians 1:1-14 and see how many "spiritual blessings" you can list. Then, discuss which blessing is most encouraging to you today?
4. If God justifies us (forgiving us and declaring us righteous) by his grace alone, why is it necessary to fight sin and pursue holiness?
5. What has helped you deepen your assurance of salvation? What has hindered your assurance?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

We started with the question: Why does union with Christ matter?

And we saw that it matters because,

- It is essential to salvation,
- It is the link between justification and sanctification,
- It is the bedrock of assurance.

Now, it's time to ask: What does union with Christ mean?

One thing I found in my research on this topic it's that everyone agrees union with Christ is really important, and everyone agrees that union with Christ is hard to define, or at least it's hard to define briefly.

It is a big and complex doctrine.

- Most of the definitions I found were paragraphs long.
- One was 257 words!

I have no desire to over-simplify this doctrine,

- but I do want to give you a definition you can remember,
- and so I want to give you a sentence.

Here it is: **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

This is the definition we'll explore over the 5 weeks.

If you heard my recent sermon series you've heard this before.

- It comes right out of Romans 5:12-6:23,
- and tonight I want to give you an overview of each part of the definition.

This will serve as a preview for what we'll discuss together in the weeks ahead.

Let me point out 5 key parts of this definition:

1. Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

We are united with Christ by faith.

- In Romans 1-5 Paul is emphatic that God's grace comes to those who believe in Christ.
- We do not work for God's grace; we receive it by faith.

Nothing can make us worthy.

- In fact, we are all unworthy.
- But we are invited to believe.

For example, Romans 3:25 says, *God put [Christ] forward... to be received by faith.*

Every good and glorious thing we're going to see about union with Christ in this study is a gift from God that becomes ours by faith.

We do not deserve it,

- we cannot earn it,
- we joyfully receive it by believing.

2. Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

In this study, it is crucial for us to see what was true about us before we were united with Christ.

- We're going to take a hard and honest look at the state of humanity apart from Jesus.
- We're going to see how hopeless and helpless we were before God intervened in our lives.

But then, we're going to see how wonderfully our entire position in life has changed. This change in position is described in Romans 5:12-21.

In those verses we find that all of humanity belongs to one of two families.

- We have all kinds of ways we divide people up,
- but here is the only division that ultimately matters.

We are either in Adam's family, or we are in Christ's family.

We are born into Adam's family, and his one sin in the garden of Eden ruined us all.

We will see how one man's failure,

- thousands of years before you and I were even born,
- put us in an awful position.

In Adam we were ruled by sin,

- condemned before God,
- and destined for everlasting death.

We are all born into Adam's family,

- but when we come to faith in Christ,
- we are born again into his family!

Our position changes, and the difference is staggering.

Adam's sin ruined us, but Christ's act of righteousness on the cross redeemed us!

One man's failure, thousands of years before you and I were even born, put us in an awful position.

One man's victory, thousands of years before you and I were even born, puts us in a glorious position.

We are now ruled by grace,

- justified before God,
- and destined for everlasting life.

That is the difference between life "in Adam" and life "in Christ."

And our union with Christ brings us into this new position.

3. Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

In Romans 5:12-21 we see the two positions of every person on the planet.

- Everyone is either "in Adam" or "in Christ,"
- and the difference is extreme.

Then, in Romans 6:1-4 we see the moment our individual position changes.

- We are transferred from life “in Adam”
- into this new life “in Christ” the moment we believe,
- the moment we are converted.

So, we’re going to spend some time thinking about our testimonies.

We’re going to see what a dramatic change God has worked in the life of every person who believes in Jesus.

We’re going to see that there is no such thing as a boring conversion!

My hope in that session is that we will all feel awestruck with gratitude for what God has done in saving us, for what he has done in united us to his Son. It’s truly amazing.

4. Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

In Romans 6:5-19 Paul begins to tell us how to apply the doctrine of union with Christ.

- Union with Christ does not only change our position,
- it changes our experience.

We have a new life “in Christ,”

- connected to Christ the way a branch is connected to a vine,
- and this affects us.

It affects the way we think about ourselves.

- In Romans 6:11, Paul gives the first command in the entire book,
- and it’s the command to think!

He says we must *consider* ourselves dead to sin and live to God in Christ Jesus.

So, we’ll talk about what it means to consider ourselves crucified with Christ and raised with Christ to walk in a new life.

We’ll talk about the importance of preaching that truth to ourselves,

- of calling our union with Christ to mind,
- and telling ourselves about it!

We talk to ourselves all the time.

- And in that session,
- we’ll learn how to talk to ourselves well!

Then, we’ll see how our union with Christ enables and empowers us to fight sin and pursue righteousness.

I'm really looking forward to those sessions.

We all get discouraged in the battle against sin. None of us are as holy as we'd like to be.

But, the better we understand our union with Christ, the more confidence and victory we will experience.

5. Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

Romans 6:20-23 serves as a wonderful summary of the entire chapter,

- and a glorious crescendo to Paul's argument.
- Eternal life, he says, is ours *in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Our union with Christ is never going to end. We are safe and we are secure in him.

So, in our final session we'll see the permanence of this union and the way it fuels our eternal hope and joy.

There are many passages in the Bible that define and describe the believer's union with Christ,

- but I'm not sure there is a better place to explore this doctrine than Romans 5-6.
- So, I'm excited to dig into these passages with you and I hope you're excited too.

We're going to break into group discuss again, but first, does anyone have any questions?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

Ok, here's what I'd like you to do for the next 15 minutes or so. I want you to read through Romans 5:12-6:23 in 6 sections. At the end of each section, I want you to pause and answer 2 questions as a group: What encourages you? What confuses you?

As you answer the second question, please have someone write your questions down, that will help me try and answer your questions in the weeks ahead.

8:00-8:15: Discussion

Read the following 6 sections of Romans 5-6 and answer the following questions: What encourages you? What confuses you? Have someone from your group write down any questions that you have:

1. Romans 5:12-21
2. Romans 6:1-4
3. Romans 6:5-11
4. Romans 6:12-14
5. Romans 6:15-19
6. Romans 6:20-23

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, “how can I be praying for you?” So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart.

I’ll close us in prayer at 8:30.

Union with Christ Life Group Session 2
The Believer's Position: "In Adam" vs. "In Christ"
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 9/23/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Welcome back everyone! I hope you've had a good week. I'm looking forward to our time tonight as we continue to explore the doctrine of union with Christ together.

Each week I want to start with a brief recap of the ground we've covered.

And last week we started our study with two questions:

1. Why does union with Christ matter?
2. What does union with Christ mean?

On that first question, why does union with Christ matter, here's what we saw:

We saw that the doctrine of union with Christ is at the heart of our salvation.

Ephesians 1:3 tells us that every spiritual blessing we have from God is ours "in Christ."

- So, if we miss union with Christ,
- we miss something crucial that God has done for us.

We also saw that the doctrine of union with Christ is the link between justification and sanctification.

- Justification describes our righteous standing before God.
- Sanctification describes our righteous living.

And both justification and sanctification are gifts of God's grace to us *in Christ*.

- When we come into union with Jesus we have a new standing,
- but we also have a new life,
- with a new ability and a new responsibility to serve and honor him.

Finally, we saw that the doctrine of union with Christ matters because it is the bedrock of Christian assurance.

- Many believers wrestle with assurance.
- It's a common Christian experience to feel some level of uncertainty about your eternal security.

But, union with Christ will help us.

- Because we'll see that God is the one who brings us into this union with Christ,
- and he will not let us out.

Understanding union with Christ will help us see the glory of God's grace more clearly,

- fight sin more confidently,
- and rest in assurance more completely.

That's why this matters.

Our second question was, "What does union with Christ mean?." And I gave you the following definition:

Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

I believe that definition is helpful.

- Not because it's short,
- or because I added some alliteration,
- but because it's biblical.

It comes right out of Romans 5:12-6:23.

- There are lots of place we can go in the Scriptures to learn about the doctrine of union with Christ.
- But this is a primary passage.

So, we're going to spend the bulk of our time here in our study.

And tonight we're going to explore that first part of the definition,

- and learn from Romans 5:12-21 what it means that
- our position as believers is "in Christ."

So, let me read our passage, and pray, and then we'll jump in...

Romans 5:12–21

[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—[13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. [14] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

[18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will

be made righteous. [20] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21] so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pray...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

The passage we just read is long and complicated.

- So, it's not possible to cover everything Paul says,
- but I want to help you see his main, overarching point.

Romans 5:12-21 is clearly drawing an important distinction between Adam and Christ.

So, let's start here:

- Why these two men?
- What makes them unique?

Look at verse 14. It says, *Adam... was a type of the one who was to come.*

The "one who was to come" is Christ.

- So, Adam was a "type" of person like Christ.
- What does that mean?

That word "type" means kind, class, or pattern.¹

- So, Adam is a kind of person like Christ.
- He's in the same class of person as Christ.
- He and Christ both fit a similar pattern.

So what type of person is Adam and what type of person is Christ?

- They are both representatives for the entire human race.
- Their actions impact everyone else.

Theologians sometimes refer to this as "headship."

- Adam and Christ are the two heads of humanity.
- They are like two heads of two households and all of us belong to one of these two families.

This is how God has organized the world.

¹ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1019.

We are either in Adam's family.

- Or, we are in Christ's family.
- We are either "in Adam" or "in Christ."

And what they have done affects us all.

We live in a highly individualistic culture, and talking about representative figures impacting the whole human race may sound somewhat foreign to us.

But, when we start to think about it, we are familiar with experiences where one person's actions affect an entire group of people, for good or for bad.

For example, we send ambassadors to other countries to represent our entire nation. What they say and what they do could potentially have serious implications for all of us.

Or, think of sports.

- One person's home run in the bottom of the 9th,
- one person's buzzer beater in the 4th quarter,
- one person's penalty shot can secure victory for the entire team.

Or again, think of a home.

- We're all aware that the actions of a father can impact his entire family,
- for better or for worse.

And Romans 5 is telling us that Adam and Christ are the heads of two households whose actions affect everyone who belongs to their families.

In our definition of union with Christ,

- when I refer to "the believer's position in Christ,"
- this is what I'm talking about.

We were all born "in Adam," into his family.

We are born again "in Christ," into his family.

That is our new position.

And this change in position brings about a dramatic difference in our lives both now and forever.

Let me show you three aspects of this change in position.

This change affects our ruler, our status, and our destiny.

1. Our ruler

Look at verse 12: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

Notice that first phrase, *sin came into the world through one man.*

The one man is Adam.

Through Adam, sin came into the world.

At our house we keep our trash cans right outside our back door. And as the week goes on, and the trash fills up, the flies multiply.

So, we try not to open the door too often or too long, because it seems like every time we do, the flies come in.

Well, you can think of Adam like the person who opened the door and let sin into this world.

He ate, he sinned, and he died.

He died physically eventually, but he died spiritually immediately.

From the moment he bit into that forbidden fruit, he was cut off from a right relationship with God.

And this action affected all of his descendants.

- “In Adam,” as members of his family,
- we were all cut off from a right relationship with God.

Again, verse 12 says, *sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

Physical and spiritual death spread to everyone after Adam.

And as a result, sin, unleashed by his failure in the garden, dominated us all.

In Adam, we were ruled by sin.

Verse 12 says, *Sin came into the world.*

Now, it’s important to understand that the Bible talks about sin in a few different ways.

- Most commonly, we think of sin as personal offenses against God.
- We disobey, we rebel, we fail to do what God requires.

That's personal sin.

But, throughout Romans 5 and 6, Paul also talks about sin as a great power that entered the world at Adam's rebellion.

He describes sin like a wicked tyrant reigning over Adam's descendants.

We see this clearly in verse 21 which says, *Sin reigned*.

From the moment Adam opened the door and let sin in,

- sin began its awful rule over fallen humanity.
- Sin began to dominate our very nature.

Look at verse 19: *By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners*.

Because Adam became a sinner,

- all of us were born sinners.
- John Calvin says, "Our nature is vitiated in Adam."²

Theologian Tom Schreiner says, "There is something prior to individual sin, something that undergirds and explains it: because of Adam's sin, human beings enter the world spiritually dead... Human beings don't enter the world in a neutral state."³

The predominant message of our world today is that humans are born in a state of neutrality, and then we are corrupted by the society around us.

- Which means that the path to salvation is the restoration of society.
- And that is why you see so much energy poured into this pursuit.

But if we set out with the primary goal of restoring society we are guaranteed to be frustrated.

- Because society is not the primary problem.
- We are.

The message of the Bible is that humans are born in a state of rebellion,

- and that we go on to corrupt the world around us.
- Which means that the only path to salvation is the restoration of the human nature.

Here's the point: We do not become sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010), 201, Logos.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 289.

Like rotten fruit growing out of a diseased tree, sin grows naturally from our rebellious hearts.

In Adam, we were ruled by sin.

But, when we become believers in Christ we are brought into his family, and we experience a glorious change!

In Christ, we are ruled by grace.

Look at verse 21: *As sin reigned... grace also might reign... through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

In Romans 5 and 6, sin is personified and presented to us as a great power, as a tyrant, as a wicked king.

And we are incapable of overthrowing sin's reign.

- We cannot stop the devastation sin causes in the creation.
- We don't have the power to stop disease, disaster, decay, and death.

We also cannot stop the devastation sin causes in our own hearts.

We resonate with Romans 7:23-24 which says, *I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Sin is more powerful than any of us. In Adam sin rules over us.

- Romans 6 will tell us that in Adam we were slaves to sin,
- incapable of setting ourselves free.

But, praise God, while sin is a great power at work in our world and in our hearts, it is not the greatest power.

And just as Adam opened the door to sin,

- Christ has opened the door to grace,
- and grace is the power ruling over his people.

As sin reigned... grace also might reign... through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we come into Christ,

- when we are united to him and join his family,
- sin's rule over us is broken.

We will see this again and again in Romans 6!

But we will also see that when we are set free from sin,

- we are not set free to live in a state of total independence,
- of unfettered personal autonomy.

We have not simply been liberated,

- we have been transferred into a new kingdom,
- into the kingdom of grace.

So, in a sense, we are still captives.

- But we are no longer captives to a tyrant,
- but to the grace of God.

And the power of grace begins healing and restoring all the wreckage that sin caused, because it is a far greater power!

Look at verse 20: *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*

Whatever damage sin has caused, grace can do “all the more” to heal and restore.

Think about our personal sin.

- All our sinful actions, thoughts, and desires pile up a mountain of guilt before God.
- We deserve punishment.

But grace means we don't get what we deserve.

- We get mercy,
- we get pardon.

Psalm 103:10–12

*He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

Or, think about our sinful natures.

Remember, we are born sinners, spiritually dead.

But in his grace God transforms us.

- He causes us to be born again.
- He gives us new life.

And that new life is supplied with new power from the Holy Spirit.

- Power to fight sin.
- Power to pursue righteousness.

And finally, think about the havoc sin has caused in all of creation.

This is a world full of disease, disaster, and death.

But one day, God's grace will abound in the complete removal of everything evil, and the permanent establishment of all that is good in the new heavens and the new earth.

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

This is the first aspect of our change in position which occurs when we leave Adam's family and enter Christ's family.

- In Adam, we were ruled by sin.
- But in Christ, we are ruled by grace.

In Adam	In Christ
We were ruled by sin	We are ruled by grace

Let me pause there and see if there are any questions. Is that concept of sin as a ruling power, and grace as a ruling power clear to you?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

Let's break for some group discussion now.

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. In Romans 5:12-21 Adam and Christ are presented as representative figures whose actions affect everyone identified with them. How familiar are you with this concept of a representative? What questions does it cause you to ask?
2. Using the handout provided for you, read through Romans 5:12-21 as a group and in the "Adam" column, list the results of his sin. Then, in the "Christ" column, list the results of his saving work. What did you learn from this exercise? What surprises you? What questions do you have?
3. How does the concept of sin as a ruling power help you understand the world in which we live?
4. How does the concept of grace as a ruling power help you understand the abundant nature of God's saving work in Christ?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

I find that thinking about sin and grace as ruling powers is less familiar to us, which is why we spent so much time on that point.

Now, with the time we have left, let's focus on the change in status and destiny that takes place when we leave Adam's family and enter Christ's.

2. Our Status

In Adam, we were condemned.

Romans 5:18 says *one trespass led to condemnation for all men.*

Adam's one sin ruined our nature,

- made us sinners,
- and as sinners we stand condemned before a holy God.

In Revelation 21 we get a glimpse of the glories of heaven.

- It's a place of unparalleled beauty, perfection, joy and love.
- And God is there in the fullness of his splendor.

But, Revelation 21:27 says, *nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.*

And our sinful nature is unclean.

- Our sinful nature is detestable in God's sight.
- So, we cannot step into the blessings of his presence.

Instead, we are cast out,

- we are condemned,
- and we have no hope of changing who we are on our own.

This is the effect of belonging to Adam's family.

- "In Adam" we are sinners by nature,
- and we are condemned before God.

And that might sound like the worst news in the entire Bible.

- "I'm condemned for something that one man did thousands of years before I was born?"
- Yes, that's right.

But, praise God, there is another head of another house!

Romans 5:14 says Adam *was a type of the one who was to come.*

- Someone came after Adam who was like Adam,
- whose actions impact everyone who belongs to his family for good.

And this is Christ! Notice what's true for all who are in him...

In Christ, we are justified.

Look at verse 18 again: *As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.*

That phrase “one act of righteousness” refers to the entirety of Jesus’s saving work.

His condescension into human flesh, his perfect life of obedience to the Father, his substitutionary death, and his victorious resurrection.

That act, that work, leads to justification for everyone who is “in him,”

- united with him,
- a part of his family.

Justification is God’s declaration that we are righteous in his sight.

When I think about justification, it’s always helpful for me to think about a courtroom.

Here I stand before God the judge,

- all the evidence of my guilt is clear,
- and I have no excuse.

But then God pronounces his sentence,

- and I fully expect to hear him say, “You are condemned!”
- But instead, he declares, “you are pardoned!”

How can this be?

- Because Christ took my punishment on the cross,
- and Christ has covered me with his spotless record of righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

That’s justification.

- And everyone who is “in Christ” is justified before God.
- That’s the great burden of Paul’s argument from Romans 1 up to this point in the letter.

And that is the ultimate source of assurance in the Christian life. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “If you want to have assurance of salvation... Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous.”⁴

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5; Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 274.

Yes, the actions of one man affect us all, but “in Christ” that is the greatest news in the world!

Adam’s rebellious action, which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born, ruined us.

But Jesus’s righteous action, which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born, redeemed us!

Adam’s failure led to our condemnation. Jesus’s saving work leads to our justification.

In Adam	In Christ
We were ruled by sin	We are ruled by grace
We were condemned	We are justified

3. Our Destiny

1 Corinthians 15:22 says, ***in Adam** all die... **in Christ** shall all be made alive.*

And this is exactly what we find in Romans 5:12-21.

In Adam, we were destined for death.

Look once more at verse 12: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

Back in Genesis 3, God gave Adam free reign to enjoy the blessings of creation.

There was only one command.

- He told Adam, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.”
- And then he warned Adam, “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

And just as God warned,

- death followed Adam’s rebellion,
- and death spread like a dark cloud over all of Adam’s descendants.

Death comes to us all.

- It touches our lives in extremely painful ways.
- It is an inescapable reality we cannot overcome.

In Adam we are destined for death,

- and if we die under the rule of sin and the condemnation of God,
- then death is the gateway into an eternal hell of darkness and despair.

If we die “in Adam,” then we die under the rule of sin, and we die condemned before God.

This is the ultimate destiny for all of Adam's descendants.

But, when our position changes. When we come into Christ, our future completely changes.

In Christ, we are destined for life.

Look one more time at verse 21. It says, *As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

In Christ, we are living under the rule of God's grace.

- In Christ, we are righteous in God's sight because of Jesus's justifying work.
- And the culmination of these things is a life with Christ that will never end.

In Christ, death will not destroy us.

- Because he is our risen Savior,
- and he has defeated death.

And instead of a gateway to eternal darkness,

- death in Christ becomes the final step into the perfections of his presence,
- which we will enjoy forever and forever.

Conclusion

The story of the Bible could be appropriately called *The Tale of Two Men*.

From the beginning of creation, God gave Adam a unique place among all of humanity.

- He is our representative.
- He is the head of our family.

And he failed.

He opened the door to the devastating power of sin.

- His rebellion resulted in our condemned status before the holy God.
- And without any intervention, all who belong to Adam's family are destined for eternal death.

So, praise God for his intervention!

He established Christ as a second type of man like Adam,

- as a new representative,
- as a new head to a new family.

And he succeeded in every way!

He opened the door to the redeeming power of grace.

- His substitutionary death resulted in our justified status before God.
- And as members of his family, we are destined for everlasting life.

This is what we mean when we say that Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ.

In Adam	In Christ
We were ruled by sin	We are ruled by grace
We were condemned	We are justified
We were destined for death	We are destined for life

Before we head to our groups, are there any questions you have for me? Anything I can clarify or explain further for you?

8:00-8:15: Discussion

1. What was the most helpful reminder you heard in tonight's session?
2. What was something new that you had not heard before?
3. What questions do you have?
4. Tonight we saw that Adam's rebellious action, which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born, ruined us. But Jesus's righteous action, which occurred thousands of years before any of us were born, redeemed us.
 - a. How does this challenge you?
 - b. How does this encourage you?
5. If someone asked you what it means to be "in Christ," how would you answer based on our session tonight?

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, "how can I be praying for you?" So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart.

I'll close us in prayer at 8:30.

Union with Christ Life Group Session 3
The Believer's Conversion: Baptized into Christ Jesus
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 9/30/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Good evening everyone and welcome back! Thanks again for setting aside these Thursday nights to gather and think together about the doctrine of union with Christ. I'm so grateful to be a part of church full of people interested in theology.

I love this doctrine.

Because the more we grow in our understanding of union with Christ

- the more we'll understand God's grace,
- the more strength we'll find for the battle against sin,
- and the more hope we'll have for the future.

This is not just a doctrine to grasp with our minds,

- this is a doctrine to experience in our lives,
- and I hope you'll see that more and more as we discuss each week.

Ok, here's a recap of the ground we've covered so far.

In our first session, we answered two questions.

First, we asked why does union with Christ matter?

And we considered three answers:

1. Union with Christ is at the heart of our salvation.
2. Union with Christ is the link between justification and sanctification.
3. Union with Christ is the bedrock of Christian assurance.

Second, we asked, what does union with Christ mean?

And I gave you the following definition: **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

Last week, we focused in on the first part of that definition: the believer's position In Christ.

We saw that there are two representatives over the entire human race: Adam and Christ.

- They are like the two heads of two households,
- and what they have done impacts everyone who belongs to their families.

We are all born into Adam's family, and we are born again as believers into Christ's family.

- When we become Christians we enter this new position,
- and the change is drastic.

We focused on three key aspects of this change:

1. In Adam, we were ruled by sin. In Christ, we are ruled by grace.
2. In Adam, we were condemned. In Christ, we are justified.
3. In Adam, we were destined for death. In Christ, we are destined for life.

Union with Christ means entering Christ's family.

- We are no longer "in Adam."
- We are now "in Christ."

This week, we're going to see more of what this change in position entails, but also when this change in position takes place.

We're going to see that union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ **established at conversion.**

We're talking about our individual lives,

- our personal stories,
- our testimonies.

Our passage tonight is Romans 6. Let me read that for us, and then we'll pray to begin our time.

Romans 6:1-4

[1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] 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.

Pray...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

One of my heroes of the faith is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

- Lloyd-Jones was an extremely successful medical doctor in London in the early 20th century,
- who left his promising medical career to become a preacher.

He spent a few years pastoring a small, country church in Whales, before accepting a call to preach at a large church in London called Westminster Chapel (not to be confused with Westminster Abbey).

Lloyd-Jones preached on Sunday mornings,

- Sunday evenings,
- and also at a special Friday evening service.

It was at the Friday evening service from October 1957 to April 1959 that Lloyd-Jones preached a series of thirty-six expositional sermons on Romans 5:12–6:23.¹

You can read all of these sermons in these excellent books (show Romans 5 & 6 commentaries).

And in the introduction to his book on chapter 6, there's a fascinating little story about Lloyd-Jones's own personal struggle with the text we're looking at together.

In 1943, a fellow preacher asked Lloyd-Jones, "When are you going to preach a series of expository sermons on the Epistle to the Romans?"² Lloyd-Jones replied without hesitation, "When I have really understood chapter 6."³

Lloyd-Jones was brilliant, he was one of the premier theological thinkers of his day, but he wrestled with Romans 6.

So, if at any point you and I are finding these passages challenging, let's not be discouraged, they are challenging!

In fact, it wasn't until 1954, that Lloyd-Jones said he "suddenly felt that I had arrived at a satisfactory understanding."⁴ And the personal impact on Lloyd-Jones himself was profound. Reflecting on his fresh grasp of the text, he said, "I found my new understanding of it to be one of the most liberating experiences in my Christian life."⁵

And that's my prayer for all of us.

- That we might find our study here in Romans 6 to be a liberating experience.
- So, let's dive in and see what we find...

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5; Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), xi. See also Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), xii.

² Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xii.

³ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xii.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xii.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *New Man*, xii.

We'll start with the question of verse 1: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*

One of the effects of really preaching the glorious riches of God's grace in Christ is that some people will misinterpret the message.

They hear how boundless and free God's grace is in Christ...

- They hear that how there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation...
- They hear that there is no sin that God is not willing and able to forgive...

And they will wonder if that means Christians can freely and willfully keep on sinning.

- After all, if God is that gracious,
- then can't I just live however I want and trust that he'll save me in the end?

Is the grace of God a free pass to live like hell now since I know I'm headed to heaven later?

After all, look back to chapter 5 and verse 20. It says, *Where sin increased grace abounded all the more.*

The more sin increases,

- the more God's grace abounds,
- and the more glory there is in our salvation.

So, wouldn't our continual sinning bring God more glory?

What does Paul say to all this?

- Does the abundant nature of God's grace give us license to sin?
- Look at verse 2: *By no means!* Absolutely not!

Now, here's the key question: why not?

How would you answer that question?

- If someone asked you, why can't I continue in sin so that God's grace might abound?
- What would you say?

There are many good ways to answer that question.

We might say, we cannot continue in sin because we are so thankful for the cross!

- Jesus died for our sin,
- how could we freely continue in it?

That's a good answer.

We might say, we cannot continue in sin because we take the warnings about false faith seriously.

- James says that faith without works is dead,
- and we want to be sure we are genuine believers.

That's a good answer too.

We might say, we cannot continue in sin because we want to honor God.

- He is holy and he demands our obedience,
- and while he graciously pardons our failures,
- we have a real desire to serve him.

That's a good answer too.

But there's a different answer here in Romans 6,

- a profound and powerful answer,
- an answer I have found so personally helpful as I've considered it.

The answer in Romans 6 is this: "We cannot continue in sin because we are united with Christ."

And we are united with him in two important ways:

1. We died with Christ.
2. We live with Christ.

As believers in Christ, we are so closely identified with Christ,

- that is now possible for us to say,
- "What happened to Jesus happened to us."

He died. And I died with him.

He rose. And I rose with him.

And as a result, we must not, we cannot, continue in sin.

Let's see what this means and why this matters...

First, Romans 6 says...

1. We died with Christ

Look at verses 3-4: *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.*

When Paul mentions baptism, he's using that term as a shorthand summary of the entire conversion experience.

The typical pattern of conversion to Christianity involves hearing the good news about Jesus,

- responding to that good news in repentance and faith,
- and then publicly professing that repentance and faith through baptism.

When Paul says baptism,

- he's referring to all of this.
- He's referring to conversion.

And so, he's saying that at a believer's conversion,

- he or she dies and is buried with Christ.
- Again, what happened to Jesus happens to us.

Now, what does that mean?

It's helped me to think about this from two perspectives:

- from God's perspective
- and from sin's perspective.

First, think about God's perspective.

When God looks at you and me what does he see?

Psalm 14:2–3 says, *The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*

God looks at us and he sees all our rebellion,

- all our corruption,
- and all our sin.

We might do a decent job of hiding our sin from others,

- or ignoring our sin ourselves,
- but God sees it all.

And as the just judge of the universe,

- he will punish it all.
- And the penalty is death.

But, Christian, when God looks at you, he sees you "in Christ."

- And so even though he sees someone who deserves to die for sin,
- he sees someone who has died already.

As far as God is concerned, what happened to Jesus happened to you.

You are so identified with Christ that his death is your death as well.

You are “in him,”

- and he paid the penalty,
- so you never will!

Think about a bomb shelter.

People go in,

- and the bombs fall,
- but the shelter bears the impact and so the people are spared.

This is what happens when you come “into Christ” by faith.

- The judgement for your sin falls,
- but Christ bears the impact,
- and you are spared.

From God’s perspective, you have died with Christ and the penalty for your sin is paid.

Next, think about sin’s perspective.

When sin looks at you what does it see?

- That may sound odd to think of sin looking at you.
- But, remember what we saw last week: Paul is describing sin as a wicked power at work in this world.

Later in Romans 6 Paul will say that you and I were once slaves to sin.

- Sin ruled over us.
- Sin had us in its grasp.

But, in our death with Christ our relationship to sin has completely changed.

Look at verse 2: Paul says, *How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

Death to sin means that a definitive breach has occurred in our relationship with sin.

Sin once ruled over us.

- Sin once held us captive.
- But now, as far as sin is concerned, we have died!

When we talk about people who have died we often say things like, “We lost him.” Or, “She passed away.”

Well, Paul is saying that when you died with Christ, sin lost you.

You passed away from sin's grasp.

You are not under sin's dominating power anymore.

From sin's perspective, you died with Christ and the power of sin is broken.

Look back at our chart from last week:

In Adam	In Christ
We were ruled by sin	We are ruled by grace
We were condemned	We are justified
We were destined for death	We are destined for life

When we were "in Adam" sin ruled over us,

- and we stood condemned,
- destined for everlasting death.

But, as believers in Christ we are now "in Christ."

And in him we are under the rule of grace, justified, and destined for everlasting life.

When Romans 6:2 says we died to sin,

- it's talking about this change in position.
- It means our old life ruled by sin is over.

And this change in position is established in each of our lives at baptism, which again, refers to conversion.

In Adam		In Christ
We were ruled by sin		We are ruled by grace
We were condemned		We are justified
We were destined for death		We are destined for life

And here's something really important: this new position in Christ established at conversion cannot change. The end of Romans 8 tells us in emphatic terms that nothing can separate us from our new life in him.

We are dead to sin.

- We are in Christ.
- That is our position now and forever.

This does not happen:

In Adam		In Christ
We were ruled by sin		We are ruled by grace
We were condemned		We are justified
We were destined for death		We are destined for life

There's no going back.

- God brought you into Christ,
- and he is not going to let you out!

In Adam		In Christ
We were ruled by sin		We are ruled by grace
We were condemned		We are justified
We were destined for death		We are destined for life

But, our experience in this life is more complicated.

- Because sin is still present in this world.
- And sin can still affect our lives.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses a helpful illustration to describe this tension between our position and our experience.

He says, picture two fields out in the countryside with a road running between them.

- One of these fields is owned by sin
- and the other is owned by Christ.

You were once in sin's field,

- but at your conversion God plucked you up and placed down in Christ's field.
- Your position has changed.

And, good news: it is impossible to cross that road again once you have been moved.

- Your position is permanent.
- You are in Christ's field and you are not getting out.

But here's the challenge you experience: sin can still shout at you across the road.

Sin can still tempt you.

- And sin can still accuse you.
- And this can still cause you to stumble and fall.

And yet, your stumbling and your falling all occurs in Christ's field!

- Which means that you can stand up again.
- And you can rejoice that your position has not changed.
- And you can learn to stay away from that road and stop listening to sin's demands.

But here's what you have to know:

- Your ongoing struggle with sin in this life,
- which will not end until you are in glory,
- does not change your position.

And this is so helpful and so encouraging when you sin as a Christian.

Because yes, you'll feel the shame and the guilt, and that's appropriate.

But then you tell yourself,

- "This has not changed my position."
- "I am in Christ."

Sin is powerful,

- but it is not the dominating power over my life anymore.
- I am under the rule of grace!

I still struggle, and sometimes I fall,

- but I am not condemned!
- I am justified!

And sin will not succeed in its efforts to bring me into everlasting death, because I am destined for everlasting life!

I am in Christ.

- So, I will confess this sin,
- and I will keep following him.

We died with Christ. Our old life under sin's power and condemned by sin's penalty is over.

Before we go to our discussion groups, do you have any questions? Is there anything I can clarify?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. What motivates you to resist sin even though you know God is abundantly gracious?
2. From God's perspective, you have died with Christ and the penalty for your sin is paid. Do you find it easy or difficult to view yourself this way? Is it easy for you to rest in God's forgiveness or do you find yourself prone to a pursuit of self-righteousness?
3. From sin's perspective, you have died with Christ and the power of sin is broken. How have you experienced this new freedom in your Christian life?

4. If believers in Christ are free from sin's penalty and sin's power, why do we still struggle with sin?
5. How does hearing about your unchangeable position in Christ help you in the struggle with sin?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

Romans 6:1 says, *Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

The answer in verse 2 is, *By no means!*

And here's the reason for that answer that we will explore throughout this chapter: "We cannot continue in sin because we are united with Christ."

We are united with him in two important ways:

1. We died with Christ.
2. We live with Christ.

2. We live with Christ

Look at verse 4: *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.*

As believers in Christ, we are so closely identified with Christ that we can actually say, "what happened to Jesus has happened to us."

Jesus died, and in a very real sense, we died with him.

Also, Jesus rose, and in a very real sense, we rose with him.

We rose to walk in newness of life.

Now, someone might ask right away,

- "Isn't the resurrection a future reality?"
- And the answer is, absolutely!

This life as we experience it right now it not as good as it gets. Praise God for that!

In fact, we still have a better life, and then a best life to look forward to.

Our better life will come when we die and go to be with the Lord. In Philippians 1:23 Paul says, *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*

Dying as a believer is a departure from this life into a life with Christ that is far better than anything we experience now.

But even that is not the best life! The best comes at the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 says, *For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*

So, life with Christ now is good,

- life with Christ after death is better,
- and life with Christ in the resurrection is best!

We have a lot to look forward to!

But, when Paul talks about walking in newness of life here in Romans 6,

- I believe he is talking about a present experience,
- not only a future hope.

Romans 6:11 says, *you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

It does not say,

- you must consider yourself dead to sin,
- and consider that one day you will be alive again in Christ Jesus.

No, it says,

- you are dead to sin,
- and you are alive to God in Christ Jesus right now!

Your new life in Christ is a present reality!

And we see this throughout the New Testament.

Think about Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus.

In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus what is required for salvation: *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Jesus is saying,

- "You don't just need new beliefs,
- you don't just need new behavior,
- you need new birth!"

You need a whole new life.

And, that is exactly what God does for every one of his people.

Listen to the way Peter describes God’s saving work in 1 Peter 1:3: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

Christians are people who have been born again.

Therefore, Paul says 2 Corinthians 5:17: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Notice the tense of the verbs.

He does not say,

- “If anyone is in Christ he *will be* a new creation.
- The old *will pass away*;
- behold, the new *will come*.”

No, this new life, brought about by new birth, is a present reality!

We are not like eggs waiting to hatch,

- hunkered down in our little shells,
- just hanging in there until the resurrection.

We are able to walk in the newness of life that we have in Christ right now.

Sure, just like young birds who emerge from the egg, we’ve got plenty to learn!

We may stumble around in this new life.

- We may trip and fall in this new life.
- We may not take off flying right away.

But we really do walk in newness of life.

This is what happened when we came to faith in Jesus.

- Again, look at our chart.
- This great change in position took place at our conversion.

In Adam	In Christ
We were ruled by sin	We are ruled by grace
We were condemned	We are justified
We were destined for death	We are destined for life



And we could simplify this even more and put it like this:



Ephesians 2 puts it like this: *You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

And Romans 6:13 describes believers as *those who have been brought from death to life.*

That's what happened when God saved you.

- That's how dramatic and miraculous your conversion is.
- You were dead, now you are alive!

I hope you see that whatever the particulars may be of your personal conversion story, there is no such thing as a boring conversion.

No one was yawning when Lazarus walked out of the tomb.

- A dead person came back to life!
- How amazing is that!

Christian, that's what God did for you.

When he brought you into union with Christ,

- you died with Christ,
- and you rose to a new life with Christ.

And now our responsibility is to learn to walk in this new life that he has given to us.

- It's a life free from sin's grip and full of grace.
- It's a life free from sin's condemnation and full of forgiveness.
- It's a life free from the fear of death and full of hope.

Do you see why Lloyd-Jones said this passage was liberating!

This is our new position "in Christ," and it was established when we were converted.

- We may not know the precise moment of our conversion (lots of Christians don't),
- but this is what God did.

And when we understand this we will see that we cannot possibly go on willfully, unrepentantly, living in sin!

It simply doesn't make any sense.

Because we are united to Christ now!

We've died with him.

- Sin's penalty is paid,
- and sin's power over our lives is broken.

We can't engage in the sin that cost Jesus his life.

- We can't go back to the old master from whom we have been set free.
- We're dead to all that.

We've died with Christ,

- and we've risen with Christ.
- We have a new life in him.

We can't act like nothing is different.

- We can't act like we haven't changed.
- We're new creations!

We have been brought from death to life.

That is the great motivation for the pursuit of holiness that we will consider together over the next few weeks.

We're filling out our definition: **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

Next week, we'll start to get really practical and move into the ways we experience this union in all of life.

But let me pause here and see if there are any questions. What can I clarify? What would you like me to expand on?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

8:00-8:15: Discussion

1. How does tonight's teaching enhance your understanding of what God did when he saved you?
2. In what way is resurrection life both a future hope and a present reality?
3. How have you personally experienced change because of the new life you have in Christ?
4. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our new lives as believers? (Consider John 16:8, John 14:26, Galatians 5:22-23).
5. With the time you have left, have a few people at your table briefly share their personal conversion stories.

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, “how can I be praying for you?” So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart. I’ll close us in prayer at 8:30.

Union with Christ Life Group Session 4
The Believer's Mindset: Consider Yourself Dead and Alive
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 10/07/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Good evening everyone and welcome back! Thanks again for setting aside these Thursday nights to gather and think together about the doctrine of Union with Christ. I've really appreciated our time together so far.

Before we jump into our session for tonight, let me remind you briefly what we've covered so far.

We're looking at Romans 5:12-6:23 since this is a key section of Scripture on the doctrine of union with Christ. In Romans 5 and 6 we find that **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

And here's what we saw regarding our position in Christ...

First, in Romans 5:12-21 we saw that...

- We were all born "in Adam," as members of his family,
- ruled by sin, condemned before God, and destined for death.

But, as Christians we have been born again into Christ's family.

- And in Christ we are now
- ruled by grace, justified before God, and destined for eternal life.

And this amazing change in position took place in each of our lives at our conversion:

At the moment of our conversion (whether we know that exact moment or not) God united us with Christ.

And as believers in Christ, we are so closely identified with Christ, that is now possible for us to say, "What happened to Jesus happened to us."

At our conversion, we died with Christ.

Romans 6:3-4 says, *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.*

As far as God is concerned,

- we died with Christ,
- and therefore sin's penalty is paid.

And, as far as sin is concerned,

- we died with Christ,
- and therefore sin's power is broken.

Also, at our conversion, we rose with Christ.

Romans 6:4 says, *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.*

Resurrection is a future hope, but it is also a present reality.

- We have been born again,
- we are new creations,
- we have risen to walk in a new life!

All of this is true because we are united with Christ.

And all of this should make a difference in our lives day by day.

I want you to see how your union with Christ affects your experience in all of life.

And today, I want you to see how your union with Christ should affect your mindset – the way you think of yourself.

Listen to Romans 6:5-11: [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. [6] 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. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let's Pray...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

The best place to start in this passage is at the end.

- Look again at verse 11.
- Paul says, *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

That is the first command in the book of Romans.

- We are 149 verses into the book,
- and Paul has not issued a single command up to this point!

And that's more than just a fun fact, it's a vitally important pattern we see throughout Paul's writings.

Time and time again, Paul presents the indicatives before he issues the imperatives.

Indicatives are statements of truth:

- God is holy.
- We are sinners.
- Christ died for us.
- We are justified by faith.
- We are united to Christ.
- And so on...

These are some of the great indicatives in Romans 1-6.

And Paul presents these indicatives before he issues any imperatives

- (which are commands),
- And I believe he does this because that is how Christianity works!

One of the most massive mistakes a person can make is to think that Christianity begins with a series of commands,

- and if we follow these commands well enough,
- then we become Christians.

That is moralism.

- That is works-righteousness.
- That is not Christianity.

Christianity begins with truth.

- The truth about God,
- the truth about ourselves,
- the truth about Jesus's saving work.

And once a person believes this truth...

- once a person is transformed by God's grace in Christ...
- then, and only then, is he or she able to live appropriately in response.

This is how God has always dealt with his people, even under the Old Covenant.

- We often associate the Old Covenant with the Law.
- But remember when the Law came...

The story of Exodus does not go like this...

Once upon a time, God appeared to Moses and the people of Israel while they were enslaved in Egypt. And God gave them 10 commandments. They were clear, straightforward, commands.

You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not murder, you shall not steal... etc.

And after God gave them these 10 commandments, he made them a promise. He said, "If you do these things, I will deliver you from slavery to the Egyptians, and I will make you my people."

If that was the order of events, Israel never would have come out of Egypt.

No, God set them free,

- he made them his own,
- and then he issued the commands.

And this how things work in the New Covenant as well.

- Christ saves us by his grace,
- He makes us his own,
- and then shows us how to follow him.

What God did comes first.

- What do follows in response.
- The indicatives come before the imperatives.

And that is also why Paul's first imperative in Romans is to *consider*, to think and reflect upon all that God has done for us in Christ.

Look at verse 11 one more time: *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

So, let's take this command in two parts and talk about how we can obey it.

First, what does it look like to...

1. Consider yourself dead to sin

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Last week we saw that our union with Christ means we are so closely identified with Christ we can actually say we have died with Christ and risen with Christ to walk in a new life.

What happened to Jesus has happened to us.

And this passage continues that theme.

- Verse 5 says, *We have been united with him in a death like his.*
- And Verse 8 says, *We have died with Christ.*

Christian, what happened to Jesus has happened to you.

He died, and you have died too.

Now, your death is not exactly the same as his.

- That's why Paul says in verse 5,
- *We have been united with him in a death **like** his.*

The differences are obvious.

Jesus died physically, and we have not.

Jesus died as a once and for all perfect sacrifice for sin, and our death does not accomplish that.

But the emphasis here is not on the obvious difference between Christ's death and ours.

- No, the emphasis here is on the stunning similarity.
- We have been united with him in a death like his.

And here's what that means:

A. Your old life is over

Look at Verse 6: *We know that our old self was crucified with him.*

- 2000 years ago, Jesus was crucified on a hill outside Jerusalem.
- And this verse is saying that your "old self" was crucified with him.

Your "old self" is the person you used to be "in Adam."

Your "old self" is your old life in your old position.

Your "old self" is the person who was ruled and dominated by sin.

Your "old self" is the person who stood condemned before God.

Your "old self" is the person who was destined for everlasting death in hell.

But that person is gone.

- That person is dead.
- That person was crucified with Christ!

Sure, you weren't there 2000 years ago,

- but when your union with Christ was established at your conversion,
- your "old self" died just as he died.

Paul says this personally, autobiographically, in Galatians 2:20 when he writes, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

He's saying, "Have you heard about Saul of Tarsus?"

- Have you heard of that notorious persecutor of the church?
- Well, he was crucified, he was killed, and he was buried with Jesus."

"That former life is over. A different life has begun. I'm a new man."

And Christian, that's the truth about you too.

You are not the person you used to be.

- Your old self was crucified with Christ.
- Your old life is over.

That's really helpful to remember any time you wrestle with shame about your pre-Christian life.

That life is over! You have been made new!

And as a new person...

B. Your bondage to sin is over

Look at verses 6 and 7: *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.*

Before we believed in Jesus, we were enslaved to sin.

Remember, in Adam we were living under the rule and reign of sin:

Sin is a wicked power that was unleashed at the fall and it holds humanity captive.

This does not mean we all sin in the same ways.

There is a difference between you and Hitler!

- But while some people's sin is worse than other people's sin in obvious ways,
- the fundamental problem is the same for all of us.

We are all born into this bondage and we are all hopelessly incapable of freeing ourselves.

But what is impossible with man is possible with God.

And here's what happened when he united us to Christ: *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.*

That phrase “brought to nothing” can be translated, “made powerless.”

- So, because of your crucifixion with Christ,
- your body of sin has been made powerless.

The body of sin refers to your sin-dominated life in this world.

Before Christ,

- your body and all its faculties,
- were ruled by sin.

But you died.

- And your sin-dominated life ended.
- And now you are free!

Now, this is really important: You still live in a body that is capable of sin,

- you still live in a body that is tempted to sin,
- but you do not live in a body that is ruled by sin.

As theologian Tom Schreiner says, “What has been shattered is not the *presence* of sin but its *mastery* over believers.”¹

Christian, you and I are still struggling with sin,

- we still commit sins,
- but we are no longer enslaved to sin's power.

We are set free.

- And here's what that means:
- we really can say no to sin.

Imagine you once had the world's worst boss.

- You dreaded going into work each day.
- But you felt helpless and powerless to bring about any change.

Then, thankfully, you were offered a new position with a new company.

- And you jumped at this opportunity.
- And that terrible season of work ended.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 318.

But, imagine that new job is located in the same building as your old job.

- In fact, your new office is on the same floor.
- So, you often find yourself bumping into your old boss in the hall and on the elevator.

And one day he sees you and he starts barking orders at you.

- What will you say?
- You'll say, "No! I don't work for you anymore!"

And Christian, this is precisely what you can say to sin.

You still live in this world where sin is present.

- So, you still bump into sin all the time.
- But, sin is not your boss anymore!

Your "old self" was crucified with Christ.

- Your body of sin has been brought to nothing.
- You are no longer enslaved to sin.

When sin tempts you.

- When sin makes demands of you.
- You can say, "No! I don't serve you anymore!"

This is what it means to consider yourself dead to sin!

You have been crucified with Christ.

Your old life is over and your bondage to sin is over.

We're going to pause here and have some group discussion. But, before we do are there any questions? Is there anything you're curious about or anything I can clarify?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. Why is it so important to grasp biblical indicatives before attempting to follow biblical imperatives?
2. In what ways does Romans 6:5 expand your understanding of what God did when he saved you?
3. If we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6-7) why do we still struggle with sin and temptation?
4. How does this passage motivate you and encourage you to press on in the struggle against sin?
5. What is one practical way you can remind yourself of these things this week? How can you remember to "consider yourself dead to sin"?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

2. Consider yourself alive to God

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and **alive to God** in Christ Jesus.*

In union with Christ,

- you not only die with Christ,
- you live with him as well.

Verse 5 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.*

Paul's saying that union with Christ is not only about destroying our old life in sin.

It's also about creating a whole new life with him!

- Christ rose to a new life,
- and as his people we rise too.

And remember, resurrection is not only a future hope, it's a present reality.

We will rise bodily in the future. But in Christ, we have risen spiritually already.

Notice that verse 11 does not say, "Consider the fact that one day you will be alive to God in the resurrection."

No, it says, *Consider yourselves... alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

That's a present reality!

- That's the current experience of your Christian life.
- You are alive to God in Christ Jesus right now.

We are united with Christ,

- and just as we have gone through a death like his,
- we have entered into a new life like his.

So, what kind of life does Jesus live?

Look at Verses 9 and 10: *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.*

Jesus died to sin. And now, Jesus lives to God.

By saying Jesus died to sin,

- Paul means that in his death,
- he came under sin's authority.

Sin had no rightful authority over Jesus,

- since he had never sinned himself,
- but he willfully submitted himself to the powers of darkness.

And he did this for us.

- Like a soldier willfully going behind enemy lines to rescue captives,
- he came under the power of sin to set us free.

And it cost him his life.

- He died.
- But he was not defeated.

Instead, sin was defeated!

As Calvin says, "By submitting to [sin's] dominion... for a moment, [he] destroyed it forever."² And Jesus's victory over sin is decisive and final. Notice verse 9 says he died to sin, "once for all!"

This will never happen again.

The power of sin over Christ is broken forever.

- And we are united to him,
- which means that the power of sin over us is broken forever too.

Christ died to sin, once for all, *but now the life he lives he lives to God.*

Now and forever, Christ lives for the glory of God.

And we are united with him.

- His life is our life.
- Which means we live for the glory of God too.

That is what it means to be alive to God.

- To be alive for his glory!
- And this is the awesome privilege of the Christian life!

Think about it!

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010), 227, Logos.

Weak, imperfect, people like us actually get to live in a way that brings honor and praise to God!

There's no higher calling than this! There's no greater joy than this!

And Christian, you've got to know this, you've got to consider this.

You've got to know that God looks at you and he does not see a person dead in sin; he sees a person alive in Christ.

In Christ, your life has been dedicated and set apart for the glory of God.

- And do you know what that makes you?
- A saint.

Many people want to reserve the word "saint" for some special class of super-spiritual Christian.

- But that is not what the word means.
- A saint is someone whose life has been dedicated and set apart for the glory of God.

Therefore, the New Testament calls all Christians saints!

The word "saint" appears 40 times in Paul's letters,

- and every time it describes believers in general,
- not a special kind of believer.

For example, in Romans 1:7 he begins this letter by addressing *all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints*.

Every Christian in Rome is loved by God and is a saint in his sight!

- And we could say the same about every Christian in history,
- including every Christian in this room today.

We are saints.

- Our lives have been set apart...
- Our lives have been dedicated for the glory of God.

Now, if that wasn't amazing enough, consider this, how many times does Paul refer to Christians as "sinners" in his letters?

Not once.

He says we were sinners.

For example, in Romans 5:8 he says *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.

But, notice the past-tense!

- “We were still sinners.”
- That’s not who we are anymore.

We have died to sin and we are now alive to God!

Our position in life,

- our identity in Christ,
- has fundamentally changed.

Yes, we still struggle with sin, but “sinner” is not our defining label anymore, we are “saints!”

And that means, when God calls us to be holy,

- he is not commanding us to pursue an identity that we may or may not attain,
- he is calling us to live in light of the identity we already have.

He’s not telling us to become someone we’re not. He’s telling us to be who we are in Christ.

In Christ, your old life in bondage to sin is over.

- In Christ, your new life dedicated to God has begun.
- In Christ, you are a saint.

So, act accordingly.

A couple years ago I was down in Louisville taking a week-long class with a few other pastors.

- During one of the breaks,
- one of my classmates named got a call from his wife.

It turned out that one of his sons was disobeying and his wife called to put this boy on the phone for a little father-son talk.

As my friend and I were walking down the hall together I could catch just one side of the conversation and here’s what he said:

“Son, mom has told me how you’ve been acting. Let me ask you something, what’s your last name?”

“That’s right. Your last name is Wells. That’s who you are.”

“You’re a Wells. And Wells men don’t act like this. We respect our parents.”

“Do you understand? Good. I forgive you and I love you, son.”

“Now, go and obey your mom.”

He hung up, and we kept walking back to class, and I thought, “what a perfect example of how God motivates us and encourages us in the pursuit of holiness!”

He didn’t say, “you need to obey so you can become my son.”

- He didn’t say, “You better obey so that you can keep being my son.”
- No, he said, “Obey, because you are my son!”

And when we are sinning as Christians we are acting out-of-line with our identity in Christ.

God could say to us, “You are my son. You are my daughter. You are a saint.”

“And saints don’t act like this. Saints are done serving sin. Saints honor me.”

“Do you understand? Good. I forgive you and I love you.”

“Now, go and obey me.”

Christian, you are alive to God in Christ Jesus, and your life is set apart, for his glory.

So, go and live like it!

And remember, we don’t obey him so that we can become saints.

- We don’t obey him so that we can remain saints.
- We obey because we are saints!

That is New Testament encouragement for pursuing holiness!

- That’s motivation for sanctification.
- Understand who you are in Christ and act accordingly.

And that is why *you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus!*

Ok, before we have some more group discussion, are there any questions? Is there anything I can clarify or expand on briefly?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

8:00-8:15: Discussion

1. In what ways does Romans 6:9-10 expand your understanding of what Christ did to save you?
2. Paul often refers to Christians as “saints.” Take a couple of minutes to read the following passages: Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians

- 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and Colossians 1:2. Have you ever considered yourself a saint? What does this mean and how does it encourage you?
3. Kevin DeYoung says, “Only by knowing our position *in* Jesus can we begin to live *like* Jesus.” Why is that true?
 4. Which part of this passage do you find most difficult to believe? Is it harder for you to consider yourself dead to sin or alive to God? Why do you think that is?
 5. What is one practical way you can remind yourself of these things this week? How can you remember to “consider yourself alive to God”?

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, “how can I be praying for you?” So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart.

I’ll close us in prayer at 8:30.

Union with Christ Life Group Session 5
The Believer's Struggle: Fighting Sin & Pursuing Righteousness
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 10/14/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Good evening everyone and welcome back! Thanks again for setting aside these Thursday nights to gather and think together about the doctrine of Union with Christ. I've really appreciated our time together.

Before we jump into our session for tonight, let me remind you briefly what we've covered so far.

In Romans 5 and 6 we find that **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

We were all born "in Adam," as members of his family,

- ruled by sin,
- condemned before God,
- and destined for death.

But, as Christians we have been born again into Christ's family.

- We are "in Christ" now and in him we are ruled by grace,
- justified before God,
- and destined for eternal life.

And this amazing change in position took place in each of our lives at our conversion:

At the moment of our conversion (whether we know that exact moment or not) God united us with Christ.

And As believers in Christ, we are so closely identified with Christ,

- that is now possible for us to say,
- "What happened to Jesus happened to me."

He died. And I died with him.

He rose. And I rose with him.

And this reality should affect our experience day by day.

Last week we talked about what it means to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

This week, we are going to talk practically about how we fight sin and pursue righteousness in light of our new position in Christ.

Remember, **Union with Christ** refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.

A key part of that experience is the fight against sin and the pursuit of righteousness.

And this is why we said in week one of this study that union with Christ is the link between justification and sanctification.

- When we see what is true about us in Christ (justified)
- we will find the strength and motivation to live it out in our lives (sanctification).

Notice how Paul expresses this in Romans 6:12-19:

Romans 6:12–19

[12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [13] 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. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

[15] What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. [19] I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

Let's Pray...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

In this first section we're going to focus on the fight against sin,

- and then after some discussion we'll focus on the pursuit of righteousness.
- It's really important for us to see that the Christian life involves both.

We fight sin; we flee from immorality.

And we pursue righteousness; we strive for holiness.

Let's start with the fight.

The fight against sin is a non-negotiable part of the Christian life,

- and it is a struggle that will not end until Christ returns,
- or we go to be with him.

But, what Paul says in verses 12-14 is full of encouragement for the battle!

He gives us six tactics for fighting sin,

- which all spring from our union with Christ,
- and which provide a path for battling temptation that you can implement again and again in your life.

I have found these tactics extremely helpful myself, and I hope you will too:

1. Reject sin's authority

Take a look at verse 12: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body...*

As a Christian,

- as a person in union with Christ,
- you are dead to sin.

Your relationship to sin has changed dramatically from what it once was “in Adam”,

- you have been released from sin's tyrannical reign,
- and sin has no rightful authority over you anymore.

Instead, you are alive to God,

- you have come under his gracious rule,
- and he is the authority you now listen to and follow.

That's true!

- That's a fact about you “in Christ Jesus.”
- And *therefore*, Paul says, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.”

Paul is aware of a challenge in the Christian life that is common to us all.

- We are truly released from sin's power,
- but we are not yet free from sin's presence.

Sin still assails our mortal bodies.

- Our life in the flesh is still affected by the fall.
- We still struggle with sin.

That is every believer's experience until Jesus comes back or he calls us home in death.

- Don't be surprised if you're struggling with sin.
- Don't think you're the only one.
- We're all in this fight!

But, don't use that common experience as an excuse to let sin reign over you.

- Don't willfully submit yourself to sin's power.
- Don't say, "Sin's inevitable, so I'll just give in."

Reject sin's authority.

Like a cruel guard in a prison,

- sin once held us captive,
- mocked us,
- tortured us.

But Christ came,

- paid our penalty,
- and purchased our freedom.

So when sin calls out for us to return,

- to put the chains back on,
- we can say, "no!"

We can reject sin's authority!

- It has no rightful power over our lives!
- Because we belong to Christ!

Second...

2. Resist sin's appeal

Look at verse 12 again: *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*

Here's an important question we need to ask and answer honestly: why do we sin?

If we know something is wrong,

- if we know the pain our sin can cause others
- and the shame our sin can bring upon ourselves,
- why does temptation carry so much power?

Because, if we're honest,

- sin is appealing to us,
- at least in the moment of temptation.

Notice that word "passions" in verse 12.

- *Let not sin... make you obey its **passions**.*
- That word passion refers to a longing, a craving, a desire.

That's why we sin.

Because temptation stirs up passion in us,

- it becomes something we long for and crave,
- something that appears desirable,
- at least in the moment.

But here's the truth:

- Sin may taste sweet in the moment,
- but it is always bitter in the end.

Sin promises life, but it only brings death.

And so when you face temptation,

- call this truth to mind,
- and use this truth to resist sin's appeal.

Admit to yourself,

- "I want to do this!"
- I desire to sin!"

And tell yourself,

- "But if I do the pleasure will not last."
- "Pain will come."
- "Therefore, I will not obey sin's passions."

That's a battle!

- That's not easy!
- But that's what Christians do in the fight against sin and temptation.

We reject sin's authority, we resist sin's appeal, and third, we...

3. Refuse to serve sin

Look next at verse 13: *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.*

When Paul refers to your members,

- he is referring to all the faculties with which you engage with this world.
- Your body, your mind, your emotions, and so on.

These are your members.

These are the parts that make up the whole of who you are.

And he says *do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.*

That word “instruments” can also be translated “weapons.”

Paul is saying, “Do not enlist yourself in sin’s army and serve at sin’s command.”

When Christians sin, we are like soldiers presenting ourselves and our weapons in service to the enemy.

And this is why when Paul asks in verse 1, *Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*

His answer is, *By no means!*

We’ve come out from sin’s authority.

- We see the destructive power of sin’s passions.
- Why would we ever allow ourselves fight *for* sin?

No, we must fight against it!

- We must refuse to allow our members to serve sin’s unrighteous instructions.
- We must resolve to resist temptation.

We must refuse to serve sin.

Instead, here’s the fourth tactic: We must...

4. Submit to God’s authority

Look at the second half of verse 13: *Present yourselves to God...*

The freedom that we have in Christ is not uninhibited personal autonomy.

When Christ comes and releases us from sin’s grip,

- he takes hold of us,
- and he brings us under the authority of God.

And there is no better place to be than under God’s authority.

- In fact, living under God’s authority,
- Is the only way to truly enjoy the kind of freedom we were made to experience.

Tim Keller illustrates this with the picture of a fish. He writes, “Because a fish absorbs oxygen from water, not air, it’s free only if it’s restricted to water. If a fish is ‘freed’ from the river & put out on the grass to explore, its freedom to move and soon [to] live is destroyed. Real freedom isn’t [ridding ourselves of all restrictions], it’s finding the right ones.”

As believers in Jesus, we have come under the right restriction.

- We live under the authority of God.
- And his commands are always just and his ways are always for our good.

So, present yourselves to God, Submit your life to his authority. With great joy!

And when you are tempted to sin, take active measures to remind yourself of his authority.

One very practical way to do that is to pray the Lord's prayer.

Pray, *Father, hallowed be your name*. Tell him that you want him to receive the glory he is due.

Pray, *Your will be done*. Tell him that you want to follow his commands.

Pray, *Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil*. Tell him you need strength to fight.

Here's the fifth tactic for the fight against sin:

5. Savor God's grace

Look at verse 13: *Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...*

Notice that Paul says we must present ourselves to God,

- we must submit our lives to God's authority,
- because of what God has already done for us.

Submission to God's authority,

- and obedience to God's commands,
- are not actions we take so that we might gain God's favor.

No, submission to God's authority,

- and obedience to God's commands,
- are the actions we take because we have already received God's favor.

So far in this chapter we have seen the glories of God's grace to us in Christ.

- He called us to believe in Christ,
- and he united us with Christ.

We died with Christ.

- The old person we used to be,
- stuck in bondage to sin, was crucified with him.

We rose with Christ.

- One day we will rise physically,
- but right now we walk in newness of life,
- supplied with the power of his Holy Spirit.

In Christ, we are people who have been brought from death to life!

And the more we savor the truth of God's gracious work in our lives,

- the more we will find our resolve strengthened to resist sin,
- and to honor him.

We need to savor God's grace, so that we might respond in fresh awe, and fresh resolve in the fight against sin.

These are tactics for the fight.

- Reject sin's authority
- Resist sin's appeal
- Refuse to serve sin
- Submit to God's authority
- Savor God's grace
- And sixth...

6. Serve God

Look at verse 13 one more time: *Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

As God's people, in Christ, we are called to

- submit to his authority,
- savor his grace,
- and then spend our days, in whatever we do, seeking to glorify him.

And there's no higher purpose than that.

- There's no greater privilege than that.
- There's no greater goal in life than to glorify God.

The White House staff will often say, "I serve at the pleasure of the President." And they say that with great pride!

Well, we get to say, "We serve at the pleasure of God." What could better?

We get to take our members... our minds, our bodies, all our abilities and faculties... and present them to the Lord of the universe and say, "what do you want to do with these?"

And he does not dismiss us because of our weakness,

- saying, “I can’t do anything with that!”
- No, he uses us for his good purposes!

This is the way to fight sin.

We reject sin’s authority,

- resist sin’s appeal,
- and refuse to serve sin.

We resolve to submit to God’s authority,

- savor God’s grace,
- and serve him.

And we do all of this in light of the promise in verse 14: *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Christian, you are no longer in the position you once were.

You are not under the law.

- You are not living under the condemnation of a law that you have not obeyed.
- You are not living under the demands of a law you do not have the power to keep.

You are under grace.

- You are living under the pardon of a Lord that died in your place.
- You are living under the authority of a Lord who supplies his own Spirit to empower you to follow him.

Both the pardon for sin *and* the power to obey are gifts of God’s grace.

And both are yours in Christ Jesus.

That is why sin will have no dominion over you.

- Because you have a new Lord,
- and you are united to him both now and forever.

IL: I ran through these 6 tactics in my car in 5 minutes recently – helped greatly!

We’re going to pause here and have some group discussion. But, before we do are there any questions? Is there anything you’re curious about or anything I can clarify?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. If it is true that because we are in Christ we are no longer under the rule of sin, why would Paul still need to say “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body”?
2. Which of the six strategies for fighting sin do you find most helpful? Why?
3. Work as a group to think of some biblical examples of men or women who succeeded at rejecting sin’s authority, resisting sin’s appeal, and refusing to serve sin.
4. Why is it so important to not only focus on the negative commands (reject, resist, refuse), but also to focus on the positive commands (submit, savor, serve)?
5. What is one way in which you want to serve God this week?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

Christians fight sin. And Christians pursue righteousness. Let’s talk about how union with Christ helps us in that pursuit by picking up Paul’s argument in verses 15-16.

He says, *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

I am so thankful that Paul does not stop at verse 16.

If the passage ended here the message would be:

- You must either serve sin,
- which leads to death.

Or you must serve righteousness,

- which leads to life.
- So, serve righteousness!

If the pursuit of righteousness is entirely dependent upon us, we are not going to get too far.

But notice exactly how Paul starts verse 17. He says, *Thanks be to God...*

And here’s what we find next: the pursuit of righteousness is possible because of what God has done.

4. God has given us new hearts.
5. God has committed us to a new standard.
6. God has freed us for a new purpose.

Let’s consider each aspect of this work one at a time. First...

God has given us new hearts

Look at verse 17: *Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart...*

Paul reminds us that we were all once slaves of sin.

But, God brought us into a new relationship with Christ,

- we are “in him” now,
- ruled by his transforming grace.

And in this new position,

- God not only gives us forgiveness for our rebellion against him,
- he gives us new hearts that desire to serve him.

Thanks be to God, Paul says, that you... have become obedient from the heart.

God makes his people obedient from the heart!

Some people have the impression that the Christian life is all about suppressing desires.

- They think the Christian life is a kind of self-inflicted misery in this life,
- with all our hope for joy deferred until the life to come.

But that’s wrong!

- We have become obedient from the heart!
- We have new desires that we delight to pursue right now!

Think about it.

- Why do you want to worship with his people?
- Why do you want to read the Bible and obey what it says?
- Why do you want to pray?
- Why do you want to give your time and your money to serve the church?
- Why do you want to tell others about Jesus?

Sure, your motives are mixed,

- and your motivation seems to wax and wane,
- but the desire is there.

How did it get there?

- God put it there.
- He changed your heart.

The pursuit of righteousness is possible because God has given us new hearts.

And, the pursuit of righteousness is possible because...

God has committed us to a new standard

Look at verse 17 again: *Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

The Christian life involves a particular standard of teaching.

- There is essential,
- non-negotiable,
- truth for us to believe and to follow.

And God has revealed this to us in his Word. Scripture is the standard.

As followers of Jesus, we are committed to believing all that the Bible promises and obeying all that the Bible commands.

And this commitment,

- like the new heart,
- is also a gift of God's grace.

Look closely at verse 17 again.

Paul does not say "You have become obedient to the standard of teaching to which you committed yourself."

Paul says, *You... have become obedient... to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*

It's a passive statement.

- You did not commit yourself.
- Someone else committed you.

Who did this? God did!

Christian, you were once a captive to sin,

- but God set you free in Jesus Christ,
- and he laid claim to your life.

Whatever commitment you have to God exists because of God's commitment to you.

God has committed your life to his standard.

- He is conforming you to the pattern of righteousness found in his Word.
- God has united you to Christ and he is conforming you into the image of Christ.

He will do it partially in this life and he will do it perfectly in the life to come.

The pursuit of righteousness is possible because

- God has given us new hearts.
- God has committed us to a new standard.
- And third...

God has freed us for a new purpose

Look at verse 18: *Thanks be to God, that you... having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

God didn't release you from slavery so that you could serve yourself.

- He released you from slavery so that you would serve him.
- You and I have become slaves of righteousness.

This is fundamental to our identity as believers.

- Now, Paul also knew that this illustration of slavery had its drawbacks.
- That's why he says in verse 19: *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.*

He's saying, "I'm using an imperfect illustration from your world to help you understand this great spiritual reality."

As God's people we belong to him like slaves belong to a master.

- We are bound to obey him,
- and we are committed to his standards.

That's what makes the Christian life a kind of slavery.

But here's how it's different from all the slavery you know:

- We obey him from the heart!
- We know that his standards are all just and good!

We are willing slaves,

- joyful slaves,
- gladly submitting to the King of the Universe.

This is our new identity, and it comes with a new purpose:

Look at verse 19: *For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

We used to serve sin.

- But God has changed our hearts.
- And he has committed our lives to his standard.

So, we are called to take all our members, all our faculties, and offer them up daily in service to him.

And this pursuit, Paul says, *leads to sanctification*.

Here we see that crucial difference between justification and sanctification.

There is nothing we could ever do that would lead to our justification.

- There is nothing we could ever do that would lead to our righteous standing.
- We are justified by faith.

But there is something we must do that leads to our sanctification.

- There is something we must do that leads to our righteous living.
- We are sanctified by effort.

And yet, do you see that both the faith that justifies,

- and the effort that sanctifies,
- are both gifts of God's grace?

We had hearts of stone, but God gave us hearts that long to obey.

We were captive to sin, but God committed us to the standard of his Word.

We gave ourselves to impurity and lawlessness, but God made us slaves of righteousness.

So, we are called to exert real effort in the pursuit of righteousness.

- But we know that all our effort is possible because of what he has done.
- And all our effort is empowered by what he is doing.
- All our effort is a gift God's grace.

And as we have seen throughout this entire study, God's grace comes to us in Christ.

Ok, before we have some more group discussion, are there any questions? Is there anything I can clarify or expand on briefly?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

8:00-8:15: Discussion

1. Have someone in your group read verses 15-16 out loud. In light of these verses, why is the pursuit of righteousness necessary in the Christian life?
2. What is the difference between justification and sanctification? Why is it so important to distinguish between these two doctrines?
3. How does our union with Christ provide the link between justification and sanctification?

4. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. How is this promise fulfilled in Christ? How have you experienced “obedience from the heart”?
5. Which aspect of God’s work in verses 17-19 do you find most personally encouraging today? How will that help you pursue righteousness this week?

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, “how can I be praying for you?” So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart.

I’ll close us in prayer at 8:30.

Union with Christ Life Group Session 6
The Believer's Assurance: The Gift of Eternal Life
The Orchard Arlington Heights – 10/21/21

7:00-7:10: Welcome

Welcome back everyone!

- This is our final week in this study on union with Christ,
- and I want to thank you again for joining me for this time together.

As a reminder, each of you completed a survey prior to this study, and on Monday we'll email you a follow-up survey to take now that our study is complete.

Thanks so much for taking a few minutes to fill that out, you are helping me complete my doctoral project!

Well, before we recap where we've been,

- and wrap things up tonight,
- I want to mention a few resources for anyone who is interested in learning more about this doctrine – and believe me, there's a lot more to learn!

First, if you want to continue studying Romans 5-6, I would highly recommend you pick up a copy of Martyn Lloyd-Jones's messages. They are in two volumes, and you can find them on Amazon.com.

Or, even better, if you want to listen to his preaching, you can find the audio at mljtrust.org.

Second, if you want to branch out from Romans 5-6 and study the doctrine of union with Christ more broadly in the New Testament, here are three books to consider:

1. Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ* (David C. Cook, 2016)
2. Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ* (Crossway, 2013)
3. Dane Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Crossway, 2021)

Finally, if you want an excellent resource to help you look at every use of the phrase "in Christ" or its variations in Paul's letters, consider grabbing a copy of Constantine Campbell *Paul and Union with Christ* (Zondervan, 2012).

Now, let me quickly remind you what we've covered in this study so far.

Our first session was called "Defining the Doctrine of Union with Christ."

And here's the definition that we've been exploring, which is basically a summary of what Romans 5-6 teach: **Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

Our second session was called “The Believer’s Position: In Adam vs. In Christ.”

We saw in Romans 5:12-21 that all of us are born in Adam: ruled by sin, condemned before God, and destined for death.

But we also saw that believers are born again in Christ, and in this new position we are ruled by grace, justified before God, and destined for everlasting life.

Our third session was called “The Believer’s Position: Baptized into Christ Jesus”

In that session we saw the miracle of conversion, and considered how God transfers us from life “in Adam” to a new life “in Christ” the moment we believe.

Then, in our fourth session we talked about “The Believer’s Mindset: Consider yourself dead and alive.”

We saw that as believers in Christ,

- we are so closely identified with Christ,
- that is now possible for us to say, “What happened to Jesus happened to us.”

He died. And we died with him.

He rose. And we rose with him.

And this reality should affect our experience day by day, especially in the fight against sin.

That’s why our fifth session was called “The Believer’s Struggle: Fighting sin and pursuing righteousness”

We looked at six strategies for the fight against sin:

- rejecting sin’s authority,
- resisting sin’s appeal,
- refusing to serve sin,
- submitting to God’s authority,
- savoring God’s grace,
- and serving him.

And we saw that we do all of this in light of the promise in verse 14: *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Then, we talked about the pursuit of righteousness, and how God makes it possible.

We saw that God has given us new hearts,

- God has committed us to a new standard,
- and God has freed us for a new purpose.

Today we come to our final session: “The Believer’s Assurance: The gift of eternal life.”

And this brings us to the final part of our definition: **Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

Let me pray as we begin our time...

7:10-7:30: Teaching Block #1

J.C. Ryle says, “All God’s children have faith, not all have assurance.”¹

To put it another way,

- you cannot be a Christian without faith,
- but you can be a Christian without assurance.

There are seasons of the Christian life where discouragement, doubt, or despair impede our sense of assurance like clouds covering the sun.

And yet, just as the sun hidden behind clouds is still shining, a true Christian whose assurance is hidden behind doubt, discouragement, or despair is still saved.

The question is, how do I get that sense of security and assurance if I do not have it?

Well, understanding the doctrine of union with Christ will help you.

This is a doctrine that helps us see God’s grace more clearly,

- fight sin more confidently,
- and rest in the assurance of our salvation more completely.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “Union with Christ... is one of the most glorious aspects of the Christian truth, one of the most profound, one of the most stimulating, one of the most comforting - indeed I rather like to use the word exhilarating. There is nothing, perhaps, in the whole range and realm of doctrine which, if properly grasped and understood, gives greater assurance, greater comfort, and greater hope than this doctrine of our union with Christ.”²

Romans 6:20-23 provide us with a good summary of what we’ve learned about this doctrine so far.

¹ J. C. Ryle, “Assurance,” Bible Bulletin Board, J. C. Ryle Collection, <https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/assurance.htm>.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 30.

These verses give us four descriptions of the transformation that occurs in every believer's life when we come into Christ.

- I want you to see these four descriptions,
- and I want you to see how much hope and joy they provide both now and forever.

Here's the first:

1. We were slaves, but now we are free.

Verse 20 says, *You were slaves of sin...*

That is a universal statement about every human being born into this world.

- We are not born in freedom,
- we are born in slavery.

When Adam rebelled in the garden,

- the power of sin was unleashed into the creation,
- corrupting everything,
- including us.

Romans 5 and 6 depict sin as a tyrannical power,

- reigning over fallen humanity,
- producing all kinds of evil in us.

The power of sin over our lives produces all kinds of sinful practices in our lives.

Like a thorny and poisonous plant,

- we may look innocent at first,
- but as we grow our true nature reveals itself.

If you've raised children, you've watched this happen before your eyes.

- You have to teach your kids all kinds of things,
- but you don't need to teach them to sin.

You don't need to give your kid lessons on how to be selfish,

- or how to burst out in anger,
- or how to lie.

Sin comes naturally because sin is in our nature.

- We're stuck in it,
- slaves to it,
- from the moment we come into this world.

And we are helpless to get ourselves out of this captivity.

We need someone else,

- someone with more power than sin,
- to come and set us free.

And this is what God does for us in Christ.

You were slaves of sin... But now... verse 22: you have been set free from sin.

God has planned and executed the greatest act of liberation the world will ever know.

He sent his Son into this world to set his people free from sin.

He frees us from sin's penalty.

When we measure our lives by the standard of his Word, we all fall short.

- God is a just judge.
- He will not let any sin go unpunished.
- And we all stand guilty before him.

But God made a way to maintain his justice and pardon his people: He gave his Son.

On the cross,

- Jesus offered up his life as a sacrifice for our sin,
- taking the punishment we deserve,
- setting us free from sin's penalty.

And he frees us from sin's power.

Picture a giant medieval castle. And inside this castle, in the deepest, darkest corner is the dungeon, and its full of captives.

And one day a new prisoner is tossed into the dungeon with the others. He's beaten. He's bloody. He looks dead.

But then, to everyone's astonishment, he gets up. He looks at those with him in the dungeon and tells them, "Follow me." Then he kicks open the doors and leads them safely out of the castle.

That's the resurrection.

Jesus entered into death,

- but he rose again,
- and he led a host of captives with him.

And when you come to faith in Christ you follow him out of the dungeon.

- You are no longer sin's captive, you are free.

Jesus frees us from sin's penalty through his death,

- he frees us from sin's power through his resurrection,
- and one day he will free us from sin's presence at his return.

Throughout Romans 6 we have seen that we are free from slavery to sin, but we have also seen that we are not finished with the struggle against sin.

We have been released from sin's penalty.

- We have been delivered from sin's power.
- But we are still battling sin's presence.

And so, in light of this new freedom that is ours in Christ, we resist sin.

In verse 1 Paul asks, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound?"

And we answer with him and say, "By no means!"

In response to all that God has done for us in Christ,

- we will not give ourselves willingly to sin's demands,
- we will give ourselves to righteousness.

We still stumble and fall.

- But that does not change our status in Christ at all.
- We are pardoned.
- We are free.

So, when sin knocks us down,

- we stand back up,
- we dust ourselves off,
- and we keep going.

And we do this with great expectation that one day the struggle will cease.

- Christ will come again.
- Our battle with sin will be finished.
- And we will enjoy our freedom in him forever.

Praise God! We were slaves, but now we are free.

That's the first description of this transformation. Here's the second...

2. We were free, but now we are slaves.

Yes, you heard that right. That not a contradicting statement to the first description, it's a very important complementary statement.

Look at verse 20. Paul says that while you and I were slaves to sin, *you were free in regard to righteousness...*

Before you came to faith in Christ,

- you had a certain kind of freedom,
- you were free “in regard to righteousness.”

Your life was not ruled by God's righteous standards,

- you were not concerned with following his commands,
- you were free from his reign.

But, as Calvin says, that is a wretched liberty.

Living far from God is not a blessing, it's a curse.

This truth is illustrated perfectly in the story of the prodigal son.

- This young man was richly blessed in his father's house,
- but he decided he wanted to be free.

So, he took his inheritance,

- left his father,
- and set off on his own.

He had his freedom,

- and for a time he had his fun,
- but it landed him in the muck.

Before long he is poor, pitiable, and surviving off filth by eating with the pigs.

He got his liberty, but it was wretched.

And that is where a life of “freedom in regard to righteousness” will lead us.

Sin has its pleasures, but they are fleeting.

- Freedom from God leads to disaster in the end.
- And Paul says, that was our story, that was our life before Christ.

But now... verse 22, you... have become slaves of God.

Here's the transformation!

- We were free from God,
- now we have become his slaves.

And if freedom from God was a wretched liberty, slavery to God is a glorious bondage.

Think about the prodigal son again.

He comes to his senses,

- he sees the foolishness of his decision to leave his dad,
- and so he goes back.

He comes with his head bowed in shame,

- ready to take the lowest position of service in his father's house,
- but his father comes running to meet him joy.

And the father covers his son with his robe,

- and blesses him with his riches,
- and welcomes him into his home.

The son is under the authority of his father once again, and it is the great privilege of his life!

And friends, when God opens our eyes to see the foolishness of life apart from him,

- and we come to him in repentance and faith,
- he receives us with joy.

He covers us with the robes of Christ's righteousness,

- he blesses us with the riches of his grace,
- and he welcomes us home.

We come under the authority of our Heavenly Father,

- and yes, we are bound to him the way slaves are bound to a master,
- but this is a glorious bondage.

Everything he commands,

- and everything he forbids,
- is for our good.

His rules are true and righteous altogether.

- They are more desirable than gold.
- They are sweeter than honey.

Serving him is the great privilege of our lives!

We must see this.

- We must remember this.
- And here's why:

There is a cost that comes as we follow Christ.

- There is a cross to bear.
- But the privilege far outweighs the price.

Jesus never promised that following him would be easy.

He said the world would hate us.

- He said we would have trouble.
- The journey into the kingdom of God is marked with many tribulations.

But the journey is worth it!

Because we get to walk as servants of the King of kings!

- The King who will come again.
- The King who will welcome us into the eternal glorious of his new creation.

Be assured, that day is coming!

We were free in regard to righteousness,

- but now we are slaves to God,
- and he will not let us go.

Let's pause here and have some group discussion.

But, before we do are there any questions?

Is there anything you're curious about or anything I can clarify?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

7:30-7:45: Discussion

1. J.C. Ryle says, "All God's children have faith, not all have assurance." Why do you think might cause a believer's assurance of salvation to grow weaker or stronger?
2. When have you personally experienced the strongest sense of assurance in your Christian life?
3. How has the teaching about freedom from sin in Romans 5-6 encouraged you?
4. Why is slavery to God a "glorious bondage"? How have you experienced this in your own life?
5. What is one way in which you know that you personally need to grow in joyfully serving God?

7:45-8:00: Teaching Block #2

In this final section of Romans 6 we're looking at 4 descriptions of the transformation God works in our lives when he brings us into Christ.

We've seen that

1. We were slaves, but now we are free.
2. We were free, but now we are slaves.

Here's the third description:

3. We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful.

Look at verse 21: *What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*

Paul asks, "When you were a slave to sin, when you were free from righteousness, what fruit were you getting at that time?"

The implied answer is none.

When Paul writes about "fruit" in his letters it is always something positive,

- it is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5,
- the fruit of righteousness in Philippians 1.

By "fruit" he means qualities of godliness.

- And before we knew Christ,
- we had none of this. In fact,
- all we had was reason to feel ashamed.

Do you see that in verse 21?

- He mentions "things of which you are now ashamed."
- And he knew what that was like.

Paul wrote honestly about his pre-Christian life and you can sense his shame.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he writes, *I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

1 Timothy 1:13 he writes, *I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.*

And many of us can look back on our lives before Christ and feel ashamed.

- Some look back and see a lifestyle of rebellion and offense against God.
- Others look back and see a pursuit or self-righteousness no better than filthy rags.

Whatever our particular story,

- apart from Christ,
- we were fruitless.

We were not practicing every possible evil.

Our lives may have even looked good by many people's standards.

But we were not producing any of the fruit that pleases God.

And had we remained this way,

- Paul says in verse 21,
- it would have ended in death.

But now... Look at verse 22... the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Now, like branches connected to a vine,

- we are united to Christ,
- and we bear fruit!

Godly character begins to grow where it did not grow before.

- And this leads to sanctification,
- to growth in holiness,
- which culminates in eternal life.

This is a massive transformation.

We used to have a little corner of our backyard that was supposed to be our garden. But the only thing growing in there was a ton of weeds.

We hadn't tilled the soil, we hadn't properly planted seeds, we hadn't really done anything.

We just let it go. And so if you went to our garden looking for fruits or vegetables, You were not going to find anything.

But, if you walk 50 feet into our neighbors yard, you'll find something completely different.

Last fall, my neighbor built this big, elevated, garden box.

And this spring he filled it with good soil, he planted his seeds in nice little rows, he even installed a motion-sensor sprinkler to keep birds and squirrels away.

It's amazing. It's turned into a miniature farm! He's harvesting all kinds of things in there!

And as I stood in our yard and compared the two,

- the only thing I could get from our garden was shame,
- but our neighbor was getting all kinds of fruit.

That's the difference between life apart from Christ and life in Christ.

If you let yourself go,

- if you live in freedom from righteousness,
- you will be fruitless.

But if you will give yourself to Christ,

- if you will live in submission and service to God,
- you will bear fruit.

God will work in you with diligence and purpose,

- the way my neighbor works in his garden,
- and he will produce all kinds of righteousness in you.

Your life will become a harvest of holiness.

This is the transformation that occurs in every believer's life.

- We were slaves, but now we are free.
- We were free, but now we are slaves.
- We were fruitless, but now we are fruitful

And lastly...

4. We were earning a wage, but now we are enjoying a gift.

We come now to the crescendo of Romans 6, Paul puts everything together in this single summary statement. *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Consider that first statement: *The wages of sin is death.*

We earn what sin pays us. And the payment for sin is death.

Notice that verse 23 says, *the wages of sin is death.*

Sin is a great power that enslaves us,

- and as we serve sin,
- we earn what sin pays us,
- and that payment is death.

This death is physical,

- and even worse,
- this death is spiritual.

In verse 23, Paul contrasts death with eternal life.

- He is referring to eternal death.
- He is referring to hell.

And he says this is the wage we earn for our service to sin.

- This is the payment we receive for our rebellion against God:
- eternal death.

There will not be a single person in hell who does not deserve to be there.

But...

That is one of the greatest words in the Bible!

Scripture is clear about our desperate position as fallen human beings.

- We have earned death.
- But...

Verse 23, but the free gift of God is eternal life.

It is so important to notice that Paul does not say,

- “The wages of sin is death,
- but the wages of God is eternal life.”

He is not saying,

- “If you serve sin, you’ll die.
- But, if you serve God,
- you’ll live forever.”

If that were the message of the Bible,

- none of us would ever enter eternal life,
- because none of us have served God as he requires.

But in his grace,

- God offers us what we do not deserve,
- he offers us eternal life as a gift.

So, there will not be a single person in hell who does not deserve to be there.

And, there will not be a single person in heaven who does deserve to be there.

Death is a wage we earn.

- Eternal life is a gift we receive.
- And it is a gift we enjoy both now and forever.

So, here is the big question everyone should be asking:

- If this is God's gift,
- where do I find it?
- How do I receive it?

Listen to Romans 6:23 one more time, *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

The gift of God,

- eternal life,
- is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And when we believe in Christ,

- we are united with Christ.
- All that belongs to him, becomes ours.

This is the bedrock of Christian assurance.

- God has brought us into Christ,
- and he is not going to let us out.

In Christ we have forgiveness,

- in Christ we bear fruit,
- and in Christ we will live forever.

That is the free gift of God for all who are *in Christ Jesus.*

And this is why **union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.**

Ok, before we have some more group discussion, are there any questions? Is there anything I can clarify or expand on briefly?

[2-3 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS]

8:00-8:15: Discussion

1. Read John 15:1-11. What does this passage teach you about bearing fruit as believers in Jesus?
2. How has Christ changed you? How has he begun to produce a "harvest of holiness" in your life?

3. There will not be a single person in hell who does not deserve to be there, and there will not be a single person in heaven who does deserve to be there. Why is this true? How does it challenge you and encourage you?
4. How does union with Christ bolster and strengthen your assurance of salvation?
5. What is one thing you will take away from this study?

8:15-8:30: Prayer

In LIFE Groups at The Orchard we always want to leave space for prayer. We want to ask each other, “how can I be praying for you?” So, take some time to share any prayer requests and pray for one another now. It might be a prayer related to our study, or it might be something simply weighing heavy on your mind and your heart.

I’ll close us in prayer at 8:30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Michael. *Sanctification*. New Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
- Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2010. Logos.
- _____. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by F. L. Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011.
- Campbell, Constantine R. *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Vol 1, *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII*. New York: T&T Clark, 1975.
- _____. “Romans 6:1–14 Revisited.” *The Expository Times* 106, no. 2 (November 1994): 40–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452469410600203>.
- Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- DeYoung, Kevin. *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

- Johnson, Marcus Peter. *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Keller, Timothy. “Because a fish absorbs oxygen from water, not air, it’s free only if it’s restricted to water. If a fish is ‘freed’ from the river & put. . .” Twitter, November 27, 2018. <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/1067499050092687362?lang=en>.
- Kruse, Colin G. *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching & Preachers*. 40th anni. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- _____. *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5; Assurance*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.
- _____. *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6; The New Man*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972.
- Macaskill, Grant. *Union with Christ in the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. 2nd ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Murray, Iain. *The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 1899–1981*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2013.
- Murray, John. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959.
- _____. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.
- Owen, John. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*. Edited by Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.
- Ryle, J. C. “Assurance.” Bible Bulletin Board. J. C. Ryle Collection. <https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/assurance.htm>.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. 2nd ed. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

- Seifrid, M. A. "In Christ." In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, 333–36. IVP Bible Dictionary Series 7. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *Dying and Rising with Christ*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006.
- Thielman, Frank. *Romans*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "From 'Blessed in Christ' to 'Being in Christ': The State of Union and the Place of Participation in Paul's Discourse, New Testament Exegesis, and Systematic Theology Today." In *"In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, edited by Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, 3–33. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.
- Williams, Thaddeus. *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

ABSTRACT

TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF UNION WITH CHRIST AT THE ORCHARD IN ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

Warren Bradley Wetherell, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

This Doctor of Ministry project was developed to teach the doctrine of union with Christ at The Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois. This was achieved through an analysis of the church's understanding of union with Christ, the development of a six-week sermon series as well as a six-week Life Group curriculum, and the measurement of participants growth in knowledge.

Chapter 1 explores the ministry context of The Orchard, as well as the rationale, purpose, research methodology, and the definitions/delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 gives the biblical and theological basis for the project, explaining a crucial passage on union with Christ: Romans 5:12–6:23. Chapter 3 gives historical and homiletical support for the project, exploring the preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans 5:12–6:23. Chapter 4 provides a description of the preparation and implementation of the project, as well as an overview of the project's content. Finally, chapter 5 evaluates the project and includes theological and personal reflection.

VITA

Warren Bradley Wetherell

EDUCATION

BA, Taylor University, 2010

MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2015

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, The Orchard, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 2011–2012

Pastor of Student Ministries, The Orchard, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 2012–
2017

Pastor, The Orchard, Itasca, Illinois, 2017–2020

Pastor, The Orchard, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 2020–