



United with Christ

Romans 6:1-7

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This morning we'll be looking at the first section of Romans, chapter 6, verses 1-7. If you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you to turn to Romans 6. Now if you would give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 6, beginning at verse 1:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given to us this your Word, and we ask, Lord, that you would make your Word clear to us and that through your Word and the power of your Spirit you would open our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ, to all that he has done, to all that he is, that we might rejoice in him, be thankful, and worship him as we ought. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We come here this morning to the beginning of chapter 6 of the book of Romans. Here we begin in earnest the second section of Paul's letter to the Romans. Chapters 1-4 dealt primarily with our justification, how we are to be right with God. Chapter 5 was a bridge between the first four chapters and *this* chapter dealing with our covenantal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, which deals with our justification but also is critical for our sanctification, which we pick up now in chapter 6.

What does all this mean? What it means is something very practical for you and me. We always have a question about the relationship between faith and life. It comes out *this* way. "I believe. How then should I live? How should I follow Jesus? What does that look like?" Paul addresses that. He addresses it in three ways that I would like us to cover.

First, he asks an important question that comes from the mind of an objector, but Paul treats it head-on. Secondly, Paul describes how we are united to Christ and all that comes from that. Then thirdly, he tells us the results of that union with Christ. An important question, united to Christ, the result of union with Christ.

As we look first at this important question Paul raises at the beginning of this chapter, we have to understand the context of where we are. Paul has covered in depth our justification. That is good, because the most important thing for us to know is how we can be right with God. It's also the starting point. Without that starting point we have nothing to do. Unless we are right with God, there is nothing that follows. But it is not the ending point.

We understand this just as naturally as life goes on. When we believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, our lives don't end. We aren't swooped up and taken into the heavens. We still have the same family. We still have the same relationships. We still have the same job. We still have the same contacts. Life goes on, and we must learn how to live *in* Christ. That's what follows from this.

The second stage of the Christian life is called *sanctification*. This is a word that comes from the Latin. It's where we get the English word *holy*. It is directly related to the word for *saint*. It may be helpful for you to think of it in kind of a paraphrase that comes to my mind. Sanctification is really "holy-fication." It's being made more and more holy. It means growing in grace. It means becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference with sanctification is in how it relates to justification, how God's grace is involved and how necessary God's grace is for sanctification.

We have to understand that a great many errors arise from considering sanctification and justification. In fact, you could say that the entire purpose of the Reformation was getting right the distinction between justification and sanctification. At the time of the Reformers, what the Roman Catholic Church had done was it had conflated justification and sanctification and brought works, the actions of people, into justification, which the Bible does not teach.

The Bible *does* teach that we are to work at our sanctification by God's grace. In that confusion, how we are right with the Lord was lost. This is why Paul moves to address this right here. He has just concluded perhaps the most definitive statement on the assurance of justification in all of the Bible. He has just explained to us the difference between being in Adam and being in Christ. You remember he said there is no third way. You are either in Adam or you are in Christ. There is no other place to go. Being in Christ leads to justification, righteousness, and eternal life.

The culmination of this is in verses 20-21, where Paul writes, "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is a wonderful passage. It is a passage of comfort and encouragement. It says to us that no matter how black our sin is, no matter how hopeless we think we are, no matter how sin has increased in our lives, God's grace is greater than all of that.

An Important Question

This is good news of the gospel. This is good news for our justification, but it also causes a problem. You may be thinking, "How can grace cause a problem? Isn't grace amazing? Isn't grace a blessing? How does grace cause a problem?" It causes a problem because if we do not see the relationship between God's grace and our holiness, between justification and sanctification, we will jump to wrong conclusions. Paul, as he does so often (you're probably getting tired of me saying this now), says, "I'm glad you've asked that question. Let me take this head-on."

Paul doesn't dodge anything in the book of Romans. He knows exactly where the objections come, so he meets it head-on. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" First, some people see grace as a license to sin. It seems so simple. If there's always more grace than sin, then it doesn't matter if we sin. In fact, the more we sin, the more God's grace shines forth. This is what Paul anticipates in verse 1, people saying, "It's actually a good thing if I sin, because then we get more grace."

"What shall we say then?" Paul says. About what? "Well, about what I just said in verses 20 and 21 about the greatness of grace." What people say is, "If we always have more grace than sin, can't I continue in sin? Won't that actually help grace to abound?" It's important to see this train of thought. The word *abound* is the same word here as the word *increase* in verse 20. They're pulling from Paul's thought to try to say that, actually, it doesn't really matter if we sin.

This is the logical conclusion. "Paul, you want grace to abound. You said it abounds where there's no sin, so I'm okay to sin. I'm actually doing you a favor, because I'm bringing more grace into the world." So when the objector says to continue in sin, what he means is to persevere in, to remain in, to stay in the state of sin. He basically says, "I want to stay the way I was before I met Jesus." This is a real challenge for us, because we must uphold the freeness of grace and the greatness of grace, but in no way is God telling us that this should encourage us to sin.

It's also natural for someone to want to remain in sin. Until we think about the consequences of sin, for example, for most of us sin is enjoyable. It's something that we think can even be used to express who we are. This is the spirit of our age. "I've got to be me. I've got to express who I am. If that means treating people rotten, I've got to be me. If that means being confused about gender, I've got to be me. If that means abusing other people, hey, I've got to be me."

We see this in our political discourse. We see it in our entertainment. We see it all over the world. It just comes naturally to us. This shouldn't surprise us, because if we're frank, holiness is hard. Right? Kids, obeying your parents is hard, isn't it? It's okay to admit it here. Your parents will still respect you. They know you're working hard to obey them. This is not something that's easy. When they tell you to clean your room, it's hard not to want to play a video game and to clean your room.

When they tell you to eat your vegetables, it's hard not to say, "I want candy instead." Obedience isn't easy. So naturally, what comes to us is a desire to sin. It's a desire to simply live however we want and just expect God to pick up the pieces. This objection may even have some appeal to *you*, especially if you're new to Christ. It is hard to change so many things about your life. Wouldn't it be easier and better to just let God's grace reign?

Secondly, some respond in an equal counterbalanced way. They say that when Paul preaches grace he's leading people to sin. They're actually agreeing with the first guy. "Paul, when you preach about grace, people are just going to want to sin." So *their* solution is "Don't preach about grace. Stop it with the grace. We don't need grace. It's only going to lead to sin. Stop it."

This is the chief argument of the Jews of Paul's time. They believed he was promoting sin as he preached the free grace of the gospel. Now this is not the only place that Paul meets this objection. He meets it in other places in his writings. Jesus faced this as well when he forgave sinners like Zacchaeus or the woman at the well. We might even say *this*, boldly: if you don't face these objections, you might not be talking about the free grace of the gospel.

So how does Paul respond? The objection is before him. What is the answer that's given? Notice once again that Paul is not avoiding the difficult questions. He actually introduces them, and he meets them head-on. This is a lesson for us in our Christian walk. We should not be afraid to face objections with the Bible and its truth. That doesn't mean you could answer every question everyone asks you.

You may need to say to someone who asks you a question, "That's a good question. I don't have the whole Bible memorized. I would need to go and study this and talk to some folks and come back to you. There's an answer, I'm sure. I just can't give it to you off the top of my head." But you shouldn't be intimidated. You shouldn't be beaten down. You shouldn't abandon the truth of the Bible because you can't at one moment answer one question.

Paul says the Bible has the answer. So he states the question directly, and then he answers it most directly. The first thing he does is reject the premise that grace leads to sin. "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" He does this in the most emphatic way. You'll recall this. We've seen it before. He says, "By no means!" "Certainly not!" or my favorite from the Authorized Version: "God forbid!" It's as strong of a negative as Paul could possibly give. "Don't even think about this. Don't let that thought enter into your mind. That's crazy talk. Stop it." That's what Paul is telling us.

Then he makes the most important and emphatic point that someone who is in Christ no longer is in sin. He says, "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" This follows from what we saw in chapter 5. You are either in Christ or you are in Adam. You can't be in both. There's no third way. In Adam we have sin and disobedience and death, and in Christ we have righteousness, justification, and life.

He puts it this way to us: you died to sin. The verb *died* here is a definitive act in the past, a point in time. It is not something that's ongoing. Paul is not telling you, "You need to be dying to sin." He's saying you died to sin. It is a once-and-for-all break in the relationship that the Christian has with sin. There is no relationship with sin anymore.

You might ask, "Pastor, don't I continue to sin? How can Paul say that?" Well, Paul says that because he's not talking about the *experience* of sin; he's talking about the *rule* of sin. The believer in Christ is no longer in the realm of sin, because Jesus has translated him to another kingdom. It works like this. Some of you have had the opportunity to travel internationally.

I just went last month to China. As I went up to the customs agents in the airport to get into the kingdom of China, I handed this stern-looking woman my passport with visa. She looked at me, and I was very much hoping that she wouldn't ask me anything that couldn't be answered by, "Yes" or "Thank you" in Chinese, because I don't know anything else. She looked at me sternly and she looked at my paperwork and got out that big stamp and stamped me. Then I walked, and I was in China.

Now when I was in China, it didn't matter what Congress was doing. It didn't matter what the laws were in the United States. Nobody was going to ask me in China how I was going to vote, because I was in an entirely different kingdom with an entirely different set of laws. Then when I came back, the opposite happened. I left behind China, and I came back to the United States.

That's a picture of what it looks like to be translated from the kingdom of sin to the kingdom of Christ. It is a translation. It's not about experience. It's like the difference between being dead and being alive. Once someone has died, they pass from the land of the living and are no longer to be seen there. Once you have passed to Christ, you have left the land of sin. It no longer has a hold on you. Why would you want to act, Paul says, like it does? You're beyond that. We are dead to sin because God has saved us from sin.

Why, then, would we want to continue to live in it? Wouldn't that be a denial of God's purpose in salvation? His purpose in salvation is to save us from sin. Wouldn't that be a rejection of who Jesus Christ is and what he did if we continued to live in sin and act as if what Jesus did made no difference at all? Jesus came to deliver us from the guilt of sin, but he also came to do much more. He came to deliver us from the power of sin so that it would not have dominion over us.

That is the whole purpose of rescuing us from Adam. We are dead to sin and do not need to live in it. Beloved, if you think you can go on sinning to increase grace, you don't understand grace. Grace reigns in and through righteousness, and it is constantly advancing in its battle against sin, not retreating. The sure sign of grace in your life is hating sin and running from it, being dead to it.

United to Christ

Paul then moves on, secondly, to explain and establish his statement from verse 2. He tells us about how we are united to Christ. First, how we are united to Christ in his death. Notice how Paul argues. He starts with a bold statement of the truth. He doesn't hold back at all. He's also not afraid to back up those statements. He begins to explain the importance of what is going on here in verse 3 through the importance of baptism.

Now he has not lost his train of thought from verse 2, so we shouldn't either. He said we're dead in sin, and now he's showing what this looks like. Again he asks a question. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" We need to be careful here, because the minute any of us hears the word *baptism* we immediately begin to think about water. We begin to think about immersion or sprinkling or pouring and the sacrament of water baptism.

We begin to think about all that's involved with baptism, what we have to do, what we say, but instead of thinking about *our* statements, *our* decisions... This comes as a logical result of the emphasis in America on baptism being an explanation of *our* decision to follow Jesus. We must think about baptism as Paul thinks about it. What Paul is thinking about is not primarily water baptism. What Paul is thinking about is our relationship with Jesus.

Baptism is a sign and seal of something else. Baptism has no reality in and of itself. If you think about it this way, the goal of life is not to get wet. You've heard me talk about baptism before as a covenantal ordinance, how it signifies a person coming into covenant with God. This makes sense here, because Paul has just been talking about the covenant. He has just been talking about being united to Christ in chapter 5.

Now why would this be so important? Well, it takes us back to chapter 5. Baptism is a sign that we are no longer in Adam, that we are no longer hopeless before the power of sin. Baptism is a sign that we are under Christ and we are dead to sin. Baptism is a sign of the reality that we are united to Christ. Now let's stop and think about this for a moment. The Bible uses baptism to describe our identity with someone. Let me give you three examples.

First, in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks about the Israelites leaving Egypt. He writes, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea..." Again we see this word *baptism*, but let me ask you a question. In what Paul is describing, who gets wet? It's the Egyptians, isn't it? They're the ones who get immersed.

Paul is not really talking about water baptism here. I mean, the Israelites do potentially get sprinkled from the waves, but the thing about the Israelites that the Bible says over and over again is they walked on dry land. Water baptism isn't in view here, so another kind of baptism must be in view. If we think about the exodus...

If you've been with us in the evenings as we've been going through Exodus, you recall that the people of Israel did not jump on the Moses bandwagon lickety-split.

The first thing they said was, "Who are *you*? Who made *you* a judge over us?" Then they said, "Why are you here? You made our jobs twice as hard. You talked to Pharaoh, and now we have to make bricks without straw. Why don't you get out of here?" Then they were saying, "Let us go back. We're at the sea. We loved Egypt. We had leeks. We had onions." I don't understand how anybody says *love* and *leeks* and *onions* in the same sentence, but they were loving it. That's how crazy they were.

They said, "We've got to go back." God divided the sea, and he showed them his power. As they went through the sea, they were on the Moses team. "You've spoken to God. God is at work here. We're following you." They were baptized into Moses. They identified with him. Mark 16:16 has caused no amount of trouble for people who think it's about water baptism. The gospel writes, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

If we read that to mean someone has to believe *and* have water baptism to be saved, poor thief on the cross, and by the way, Jesus was wrong when he said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." But if we read this as saying, "Whoever believes and is identified with Jesus and is in covenant with Jesus and is a part of Jesus' kingdom as represented by baptism," then that passage makes perfect sense. It's not just that I *say* I believe; I have to identify with Jesus.

Now let's not downplay the importance of baptism. In our day, baptism is a nice event. In other parts of the world, it could be a death sentence. It certainly was in Paul's day, because when you were being baptized you were saying, "I identify with Jesus. Jesus is Lord." What the authorities heard was, "I don't identify with Caesar. Rome is not my lord," and they saw you as a traitor and you needed to be killed.

See, baptism by water is just a sign and a symbol of that greater reality of identification. In the famous passage in Matthew 28, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," what Jesus is saying here is, "Baptize people into the Trinity. They need to identify with God, with *all* of God. Not just the Father, not just the Spirit, not just the Son, but with all three persons of the Godhead, because all three persons are involved in salvation."

So if we are identified with Christ, if we are united to him, we are united with all that he is and has done, and this includes his death. Jesus died for sin, putting it away once and for all. So we also died to sin, being united to Christ, and therefore we are to put away sin once and for all. It has no power over us. Paul makes this point even more strongly in verse 4 when he mentions burial. He says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death..."

Again, this is not an argument for immersion. What people love to say is, "You see? We have to immerse somebody in water, because just like you put somebody in a hole and bury them with dirt, you need to go

totally under the water." There's only one problem with that. When Paul wrote that they never buried people that way. They didn't dig a hole and put six feet dirt over them. That's a Western concept. What they did was they put people in a cave. It was completely different.

So again, water is not in view here. What this is actually is an argument that we have completely passed out of the realm of sin. Paul is being more emphatic. Think about it *this* way. If you've ever been to a funeral, when someone dies, it's a sad occasion. There's grief. As Christians, we don't grieve without hope, but there's still grief. It's different when the person is still around, when you go to the funeral home and the body is up at the front.

In some traditions, even, the casket is open and you can walk by and look at the person. That person is dead. You don't expect them to speak. But it's different when you then go to the graveside and lower the casket in and cover it with earth. That's when you sort of say, "This is done." That's when you take a breath if you're family. That's when you can begin the grieving process in earnest, because they're no longer in the land of the living. It's obvious. It's visible.

That's what Paul is saying. When you're buried, everyone knows you're really dead. You're not coming back. You're out of the realm of the living and in the realm of the dead. What Paul is saying is there should be no confusion at all, that we are dead to sin, dead and buried to sin. But Paul doesn't stop there. It's not enough for our union with Christ to be expressed in terms of his death. He also expresses it in terms of Jesus' life.

Our identity with Christ does not stop at the grave. Death to sin is not sufficient to describe our unity with Christ. It is necessary, it is foundational, but it is not sufficient and doesn't fully describe our unity with Christ. In order to live with Christ in his resurrection life, we must first die with him in his death to sin, but there's more that comes from that. Paul makes this connection explicit in verse 4. "...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."

Look at the sentence structure of verse 4. Paul begins by repeating his important statement about being dead to sin. Then he tells us that this death and this burial and this baptismal identity have a purpose. He uses a purpose clause "in order that." That's just like saying, "I went to the store in order to buy milk." Why did I go to the store? Was I just bored? Did I just need to stretch my legs? No, I went with a purpose to buy milk. Paul gives us this same kind of purpose clause.

Now what *is* that purpose? The purpose, Paul says, is so that we might walk in the newness of life. This makes sense with Paul's ethical argument earlier in verse 1. You remember he started by saying we're not to live in sin. Why? Because we're dead to sin. And why are we dead to sin? So we might live in the newness of life that Jesus has purchased for us.

It follows exactly what Paul said in chapter 5, that the Father sent Jesus to be our new covenant head, to save us from sin, death, and disobedience in Adam, and so that we might find righteousness, life, and obedience in Christ. We are not just rescued from hell by Jesus. We are made new. We are brought into his kingdom. We are identified with him. We are given a new life free from sin and its power. Paul makes this point clear by telling us we are united to Christ.

Result of Union with Christ

So what is the result of our union with Christ? What does it mean to be freed from sin's dominion? Paul then says we are dead to sin and alive in the newness of life, and he begins to describe to us the practical ways that this results in our lives. This is Paul's practical way of describing what it means not to be in Adam but rather to be in Christ.

Now why should this matter to us? We have to remember that all that Paul has been saying is in answer to the very practical question... *Should we continue in sin?* Paul gives us two practical results that will be expounded on more in chapters 6 and 7, but to start with here he tells us that we have our old self or, as some translations say, our old man is now dead.

Look at verse 6. "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing..." He says our old self is dead. More specifically, it is crucified with Christ. The idea here is that when Christ was crucified and paid the penalty of sin, we were crucified with him. Not that we paid the penalty or that our death was needed but, rather, that we have been completely transformed by the work of Jesus.

Some of you understand this from one of the more famous verses in the New Testament. I think many of you have even memorized it, Galatians 2:20, in which Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

What is Paul saying here? Is he saying that now I'm not alive; I'm just some sort of automaton that Jesus is pulling the strings on and I have no self-awareness? No. What he's saying is I'm united to Christ, and when Christ died *I* died, and as Christ lives *I* live, and all that Christ has *I* have, because I am so closely identified with him. My old self, that old, unregenerate me in its entirety is gone.

That is the person I was in Adam. That is the one I was under sin and death, one without hope, one without power to resist sin, one who rebelled against God and who hated his rule, but now I've been transformed. The problem is sometimes people talk about the old man like he's still alive. There's always bad theology out there, and one of the problems with bad theology is it leads to discomfort and bad practical application.

You may have heard something that goes like this. After you profess faith in Christ people will say, "Well, you know, now it's like you have two dogs living inside you. There's a black dog and a white dog, and really, your life just depends on which dog you feed best. If you feed that old sin nature, then he's going to overwhelm. What you need to do is starve him. You need to put him on hospice. You need to make him sit and not get anything. You need to feed that white dog. You need to feed that holiness."

Respectfully, that's nowhere in the Bible. What the Bible tells us is that when we are in Christ our old man is not cowering inside us hoping to get dinner. He's dead. He's gone. We're not in that realm anymore. Let me put it to you *this* way. If you think about it, after you have believed on Jesus Christ, you have more in common with yourself in glory than you do with yourself before conversion. Think about that for a minute.

You may say to me, "Pastor, that doesn't make much sense to me. I still have all of my aches and pains. I'm still getting old. I still have the falling out gray hair. You're going to tell me that I'm going to be like my body in glory when I'm with Jesus and I'm sinless?" No, I'm not saying you're exactly like that. I just said you're *more* like that than before you met Jesus, because now you are no longer under sin. You are no longer under the power of sin, just as you *will* be in glory.

In the past, you were under the dominion of sin, under its power. The old man was alive, but now he's dead. Jesus doesn't just forgive sin; he makes you new. One of the best ways Paul puts it is so brief. He says, "You are a new creation in Christ Jesus." Do you believe that? Do you live like that? Paul reminds us that Jesus died so we could be a new creation. Jesus didn't die to improve you; he died to make you new. Because we are united with Christ, his death is our death. He put to death sin in its penalty and its power on the cross.

Then there is a second result of this union. Because our old self has been crucified with Christ, that which ruled over our old self is dead. This is extremely practical. It means that you have hope right now, today, to fight sin, to gain victory over the sin in your life. Paul tells us this purposefully. This is why it is so against the Bible and the doctrine of salvation and Paul's theology in Romans for us to create hyphenated Christians.

There's no such thing as a lying Christian, there's no such thing as a stealing Christian, and there's no such thing as a gay Christian. We are not identified by our old man. We are not identified by our sin. We may struggle with sin. We may struggle with the body of sin. It's hard. We need to put to death sin. We're not instantly glorified, but we don't identify with that sin because we're not under its power. We hate it. We war against it. We kill it.

You can be somebody who struggles with the temptation of lying, but you are not a lying Christian. Do not pretend that it's okay to be a lying Christian. Our society is making this more and more prevalent as it attacks the Scriptures and the doctrine of the Scriptures. Paul uses another purpose phrase here, another "in order that" to tell us why the old self was crucified.

The old self was crucified in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing. The old person we were is dead. That means the sin that remains has no hope of survival. It is actually being made more and more powerless. It is being brought to nothing. When Paul uses this word, he means it will no longer be effective. Ultimately, it will be wiped out. This explains several things about the Christian life.

First, it explains that there's still a battle to fight against the body of sin. Paul is talking about that. Second, it explains to us that because sin is in the world it still entices us and affects us, but it no longer has dominion over us. It cannot control us. We can defeat it day by day. That's why we have verse 7. Having died with Christ, we are set free from sin. We've been given a new heart of flesh and a new life. We are no longer in bondage. We have been set free.

What a glorious thought, especially as we struggle with sin. There *is* a struggle, but Jesus tells you that he has already won the victory, not just over the penalty of sin but over its power as well. Our salvation is great. It is so much more than the forgiveness of sins and avoiding hell. It is being united to Jesus. It is being made more and more like Jesus so that we might live free from sin and in a life of righteousness.