

May 14, 2017 by Steve Brandon



United With Christ

Romans 6:1-11

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1. United in Death
2. United in Life

As most all of you know, we have been working our way through the book of Romans. We are going at the rate of about a paragraph every week. We arrived last week into chapter 6, which forms a transition of sorts.

Just as we are transitioning from Winter to Spring, we also are transitioning from Paul's treatment of salvation to Paul's treatment of sanctification. And in this transition, we need to be very careful. We need to be careful in thinking that Paul is leaving one subject and talking about another subject entirely. In other words, we need to be careful lest we think that our sanctification is separate and distinct from our salvation. Our natural tendency is to distance these things.

For instance, John Piper has written about "the debtor's ethic." It goes like this:

The debtor's ethic has a deadly appeal to immature Christians. It comes packaged as a gratitude ethic and says things like: "God has done so much for you; now what will you do for Him?" "He gave you His life; now how much will you give to Him?"

The Christian life is pictured as an effort to pay back the debt we owe to God. The admission is made that we will never fully pay it off, but the debtor's ethic demands that we work at it. Good deeds and religious acts are the installment payments we make on the unending debt we owe God." [\[1\]](#)

Such a thinking distances salvation from sanctification. On the one hand, we are saved by grace through faith. Then, once we are saved, we respond by working on our sanctification. And that response is often distanced from our salvation, as if they were two different things, entirely.

Now, this distinction can be blatant at times, when people begin making a distinction between being a "believer" in Jesus and being a "disciple" of Jesus. In other words, believing in Jesus is like walking through the front door of your walk with God -- your salvation. When you walk through that front door, you are "saved." You are forgiven of your sin. You have escaped your condemnation.

But if you want to grow in your relationship with Jesus, you must become a "disciple" of Jesus, that is, a "committed follower" of Jesus. And to be a disciple, you must learn his ways and must do his deeds. That's a blatant way of creating distance between salvation and sanctification. But, there are even more subtle ways of doing so when we only talk about sanctification in terms of our "response to salvation." In other words, we are saved by grace through faith, and such a salvation ought to make a huge difference in our lives.

There is plenty of Biblical warrant for such thoughts. "...and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15). "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). But one of the dangers in this is that we miss the connection between our salvation and our sanctification, merely describing it in terms of our "response."

I say all of this because, the main thrust of Paul's argument in Romans 6 as he transitions into talking about sanctification, is not a "response" connection. Listen to Marcus Johnson's words on our text. He says it far better than I could.

[in Romans 6, Paul] ... responds incredulously to an imaginary interlocutor who suggests that continual sinning by those who are justified might furnish the occasion for God to serendipitously manifest his grace: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" (vv. 1-2a).

Paul's incredulity is directed toward an apparently fundamental misunderstanding of the reality of salvation and its far-reaching, existence-altering effects: "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" (vv. 3-4).

It is important to note what Paul does not say in order to appreciate what he does say. In response to the absurd notion that God's free grace in justification provided the possible occasion for continual sin, Paul does not say, "Do you not know that we all 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 stretched back to a more all-encompassing reality: our participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The questioner has not understood what it means to be united to Christ."

...

Our participation in Christ's death sets us free from the enslavement of sin, and our participation in his resurrection makes us alive to God in righteousness: "Paul makes it clear, by the sequence in this paragraph, that we can live a holy life only as we appropriate the benefits of our union with Christ." (Douglas Moo).

Because it is a given for Paul that believers are united to Christ in his death and resurrection, his incredulity is perfectly understandable. He is not expressing the hope that believers might respond to God's grace in obedient gratitude or that God's freely justifying grace might provide an incentive to lives of holiness. Rather, he is insisting on the more fundamental, inescapable reality that believers are the present beneficiaries of the sanctifying effects of Christ's death and resurrection.

[\[2\]](#)

Did you catch that? Paul's response to those who would entertain the notion of increasing sin so as to increase grace doesn't point us to our proper response to grace. Be that a response of gratitude or a response of overwhelming grace incentive. Rather, Paul's response is to point us to the reality of our union with Christ. When Christ died, we died with him. When Christ was buried, we were buried with him. When Christ rose from the dead, we rose with him.

In other words, we are "united with Christ." Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning: "United with Christ."

To continue on in sin isn't wrong because it draws a wrong conclusion. It is wrong because it is a response to our salvation. It is wrong because it doesn't understand our union with Christ, which is the essence of our salvation.

Think back to Romans 5. The main point is that there were two men who performed two acts which led to two results. Adam's sin brought death and judgment to mankind. Christ's sacrifice brought life and justification to mankind.

We were condemned because we were united with Adam. When Adam sinned, we sinned with him. We are justified because we are united with Christ. When Christ obeyed, we became righteous--not because we were, indeed, righteous, but because of our union with Christ.

Paul brings out our union with Jesus into crystal clarity in our passage this morning. I pick that up in the title of my message: "United with Christ." And as I read our text of Romans 6:1-11, I want for you to listen for how Paul describes our union with Christ. Particularly, I want for you to listen to the number of times that Paul mentions the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and connects it with us.

Romans 6:1-11

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. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

A few weeks ago, when we were in chapter 5 (verses 15-19), we saw that Paul was very repetitive. That is, he said the same thing over and over and over again. Do you remember that? For five verses in a row, Paul mentioned the two men who performed two acts which led to two results. Look back at chapter 5.

Romans 5:15

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. 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. 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.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 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.

Well, Paul does the same thing in our text this morning. He says the same thing over and over and over again.

But this time, he isn't talking about the two men who performed two acts which led to two results. This time, Paul speaks about the two ways in which we are united with Christ. We are united with him in his death. We are united with him in his life.

Indeed, these two words will form the basis of my outline this morning.

1. United in Death
2. United in Life

Look at our text. Notice the number of times that Paul mentions death and life. Look at the number of times that Paul connects our life to the life of Jesus (using words like, "with him.") Now, the important thing to note here isn't the number of times that these sorts of things are mentioned. But, the important thing is that it is all over our verses this morning.

They are talking about us being united with Christ—in his life, and in his death. Thus the title of my message. Thus, my outline.

As we work through our text this morning, we are going to go verse by verse, looking at these themes. They come up in every verse!

Romans 6:1-2

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?

There's the big question: "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" He isn't focusing here on our response. It's not "How can we, who have experienced God's grace, do anything else other than walk in that grace." Rather, Paul is focusing here on our condition. We have been united with Christ. And if we have died with Christ, we cannot continue to live in sin.

Paul begins with baptism.

Romans 6:3-4

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, 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.

Now, these verses are filled with controversy. When Paul says, "baptism," what is he talking about? Is he talking about water baptism? Is he talking about spirit baptism? Is he talking about another sort of baptism?

Much of the controversy has to do with what Paul says about baptism. He says that our baptism was the means by which we were "baptized into his death" (verse 3). In other words, it is our baptism that unites us with Christ. And thus, it is our baptism that brings us to salvation. Therefore, some take this to mean that baptism is imperative for one's salvation.

There are people who believe this. There are churches (in this town) who believe this. The greatest difficulty with this is Paul's entire argument in the book of Romans. He has argued long and hard (for 2½ chapters) that salvation comes by grace through faith.

Romans 3:24

[we] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 4:4

To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Romans 5:1

We have been justified by faith.

And to think that Paul, here in Romans 6:3-4 would bring in a new concept of being saved through water baptism is very difficult to believe. Nowhere in Romans 3, 4, or 5, did Paul bring up baptism when talking about our salvation. It only comes up when talking about our sanctification, which makes sense if you believe that baptism is an act of obedience subsequent to salvation.

But the difficult matter has to do with the language of verse 3. Look again, ...

Romans 6:3-4

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, 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.

Baptism here appears to be the means of our union with Christ. It is "by baptism" that we are joined with Christ.

At this point, there are several interpretive options. You can say that this isn't referring to water baptism, but that rather, it's referring to our spiritual baptism into Christ. We can say it is because our water baptism doesn't unite us to Christ, but our spiritual baptism does.

And this is a fine interpretive option. It keeps the integrity of the text. It allows us to say with full confidence that it is "by baptism" that we are joined with Christ, because we say that it is "through our spiritual baptism" that we are joined with Christ.

But there is another way. You can take this as water baptism, if you understand water baptism as a symbol of the reality. Here is what John Piper says, ...

In the wider context of Romans, I think it would be a mistake to say that water-baptism is the means of our being united to Christ. In Romans, faith is the means by which we are united to Christ and justified. But we show this faith—we say this faith and signify this faith and symbolize this faith—with the act of baptism. Faith unites to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union.

An analogy would be saying, "With this ring I thee wed." When we say that we don't mean that the ring or the putting of the ring on the finger is what makes us married. No, it shows the covenant and symbolizes the covenant, but the covenant-

making vows make the marriage. So it is with faith and baptism.

I think the analogy is good. A wedding ring is a symbol of marital love. The precious metal shows how love in the most precious possession. The unending circle symbolizes that love should never cease. And so, we say, "with this ring, I thee wed." But it's not the ring!

So also with baptism. Baptism is the symbol. Baptism is the analogy.

And so, what's the analogy? What's the picture? The picture is one of being buried (verse 4). The picture is one of being "raised from the dead" (verse 4).

That's where baptism is a perfect symbol of our salvation. When someone enters into the waters of baptism, and tells their story of how God saved them from their sin and brought them into life. And when they are immersed into the waters, dying, if you will. When they come up out of the waters, raising from the dead, if you will. It is a perfect picture of what God does with a soul that believes in Christ.

He unites him in his death. He unites him in his life. That's exactly what verse 5 says.

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.

That's the perfect picture of baptism. Dying through immersion, and coming up out of the water to new life.

This is one reason why we don't sprinkle infants at Rock Valley Bible Church. The imagery doesn't make sense. The imagery is of a new life. It's a life that has died with Christ. It's a life that has been raised up with Christ. It's a life that walks "in newness of life" (verse 4).

Our practice at Rock Valley Bible Church is to baptize those who come to faith in Christ. We offer an opportunity every summer. We go to the lake on a Sunday afternoon. We set up a loud-speaker for all to hear. Those who are being baptized have an opportunity to tell their story of how they used to live before Christ. Of how they came to faith in Christ, and experienced the forgiveness of sins. Of how their life has changed.

And as an expression of their faith, they are being baptized to let the world know that they are identifying with Christ. They are being baptized to symbolize their cleansing from sin, as they are buried into the waters, and as they are raised to "walk in newness of life" (verse 4).

In fact, this is what I say at every baptism I perform: "... because of your profession in faith in Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ..." I bury them in the water to symbolize their death with Christ. They come up out of the water to symbolize their new life with Christ. And then I always say, "Walk in newness of life" (verse 4), because the picture is so perfect of salvation. You have died with Christ. Now, live with him.

Like I said, we offer this every summer. If you are here today and haven't been baptized as a believer, but would like to be, talk with me. I would love to work things through with you. I would love to answer any questions that you have about baptism. I would love to hear your salvation story.

And this summer, we will go out to the lake. Now, we usually go to Olson Lake (at Rock Cut State Park), but it's going to be closed this season, due to the build-up of silt. There is talk about them dragging the lake to clean it. But if they don't, we'll find some other place if we can't go there. Perhaps the river, perhaps another lake. Someplace where there is plenty of water. Someplace where there are plenty of people to see and hear of the wonderful things that Christ does in a life.

OK, let's look again at verse 5, ...

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.

Perhaps you noticed here how the reality of verse 5 goes beyond this life to the life to come. It points to the resurrection of Jesus, and how we too will join up in the resurrection of Christ. It points to our hope beyond the grave. This is the point of "eternal life."

Romans 5:20

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.

When we are united with Christ, the unity continues forever! And the newness of life in which we live now is but a taste of our future life when we will be like Jesus, fully redeemed, fully restored into his image.

In fact, this is the aim of our salvation.

Romans 8:29

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

And that's where every believer in Christ will be some day, conformed to the image of his Son! We will be there fully one day, at the final resurrection, when, "...we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Let's continue on in verse 6, ...

Romans 6:6

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.

This is the reality of what it means to be united with Christ. We were crucified with him.

Now, I admit that this is difficult to fully comprehend. How is it that we were crucified with Jesus? He was crucified some 2,000 years ago! And yet, in some measure, we were crucified with him. And Paul expects us to know this. Verse 6 begins with these words, "We know that our old self was crucified with him."

Do you know that? Paul expects us to know these things.

Romans 6:3

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Yet, the reality is that few of us really know this. It is a mystery--how we are united with Christ in his death. But here's the thing: if we are going to live a sanctified life, this is the matter of utmost importance. It is the idea the Paul first brings to our attention when talking about sanctification: we are united with Christ.

It is significant that Paul didn't begin his discussion of sanctification with reference to a list of do's and don'ts. Because, such lists will never see us experience sanctification. It is only when we understand our union with Christ that takes place in our salvation that we will ever hope to live a sanctified life.

I have a book on my shelf entitled, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification" by Walter Marshall.

Indeed, the way of sanctification is indeed mysterious. It almost defies explanation. But it is wrapped up in the gospel. It's closely linked! As we understand and embrace and experience the gospel in our lives, the fruit will be sanctification.

Here is Bruce McRae's summary of Marshall's book:

"You are more sinful than you can imagine! The doctrine of Original Sin is true! You cannot reform your flesh! You cannot become a better person by your own strength no matter how hard you try! But cheer up! If you are a Christian, you have come into union with Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Through faith in Jesus Christ you are sanctified and made holy. Through Christ, you are a new creation! The Holy Spirit lives in you! Therefore, pursue the life of faith in Christ with all diligence!"^[3]

So again, we see verse 6, ...

Romans 6:6

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.

It's as we fully embrace our crucifixion with Christ that our body of sin will be brought to nothing. And then, in verse 7, Paul gives the reality of what death means to sin.

Romans 6:7

For one who has died has been set free from sin.

You go to a funeral, and you see the body lying in the casket. The once sinner is no longer sinning! And that's what takes place in the gospel. As our old self was crucified with Christ, it is dead. And we have been set free from sin!

Now, that's not to say that we won't ever sin. Paul in Romans 7 will detail the struggle.

Romans 7:15-25

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but 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? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

So, Paul isn't talking about sinless perfection. But, he is talking about freedom from sin. As our old self had died, we are free from sin. We are no longer slaves of sin.

In verse 8, Paul again picks up the idea of our life with Christ.

Romans 6:8-10

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life

he lives he lives to God.

And then comes the application:

Romans 6:11

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is the first command in all of Romans. It fits nicely with our Fighter Verse this week, ...

Galatians 5:24-25

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

We are United With Christ--United in Death and United in Life.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 14, 2017 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] "Brothers, We Are Not Professionals," p. 34.

[2] Marcus Johnson. "One With Christ," pp. 123-125.

[3] Walter Marshall. "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification," p. 13).