

Dying to Live with Christ: Romans 5:18-6:14, 2 Corinthians 5:4-21

Adapted from: "Romans – Attending My Own Funeral" Pastor Pat Damiani

I was driving back from the hospital bed of a very sick friend when my somber thoughts were interrupted by flashing blue lights in the rearview mirror. Having pulled over, the police detective came to my window with the standard question: "*did I know how fast I was going?*" My honest reply was to apologize and admit that I had been driving somewhat distracted. So, after checking my license and seeing my chaplain's tag, the officer commented that in watching me quickly drive up beside his car, he had expected me to see him and slow down, but when I continued on past him still doing 45 in a 35 mile per hour zone, he felt compelled to pull me over. But then he let me off with just a warning and some encouragement that whenever I am behind the wheel I need to keep my mind behind the wheel as well. So, I thanked him and drove more carefully and consciously home.

That officer would have been justified in giving me a ticket, but instead he gave me grace. So you can bet that ever since, I have kept that incident in mind and am very careful to also keep my mind behind the wheel and not presume that I might receive more grace the next time.

However, for some reason, when it comes to our relationship with God, there are a those Christians who do presume that since God has already extended His grace to us for every sin we have ever committed, therefore we can keep on sinning because God's grace has covered it all.

But is that how God's grace is supposed to work in my life?

And that is today's topic for consideration:

How do I relate to sin, now that I am a Christian?

These are questions we'll attempt to answer this morning from Romans chapter six. But before we climb into this new section, let's once again review what Paul has previously taught us, because every new topic he brings up often builds upon what has gone before.

- The first three chapters of Paul's letter taught us that **we are all sinners** and our sin has separated us from God and--in our knowing violation of His laws--we deserve His wrath.
- Then in chapters four and five Paul explains the idea of **justification**; how God can legally declare us "not guilty" because Jesus has paid the **penalty of our sin**. We learned that there is nothing we could do to pay this penalty through our own efforts and so the only way it could be paid is to have God credit us with the righteousness of Jesus when we place our trust in Him.

Here is the key verse:

since all have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God;
they are now **justified by His grace** as a gift,
through the **redemption that is in Christ
Jesus**, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of
atonement by his blood, effective through faith.
Romans 3:23-25

- Now, beginning in chapter six, Paul is going to shift away from this idea of **justification**, **how God cancels the power of sin over our lives**, to address another concept ...
- **sanctification**, which deals with how Jesus has overcome the power of sin **in our lives...so that we can actually live a righteous life like his.**

Note this: While justification and sanctification are always linked in our Christian life, they are not the same.

- **Justification is a past and one-time legal act** by which, through our faith in Jesus, God declares us to be righteous.
- On the other hand **sanctification is an ongoing process** whereby God's now indwelling Holy Spirit helps us to become the kind of righteous person that He earlier declared us to be.

And this shift of topic from justification to sanctification all started with another one of those silly questions that Paul anticipates someone is going to ask because of what he just wrote at the end of chapter five.

**but where sin increased,
grace abounded all the more ...**
Romans 5:20-21

As we had learned previously, the giving of the law "increased our sin" in the sense that it taught us God's standards. What we had previously violated in ignorance we now knowingly transgress, thus earning God's wrath. But God's grace which is so much greater than all my sins and transgressions both covers them all, and completely does away with them once for all. So now, Paul must address a hypothetical and somewhat absurd question that naturally arises out of this idea. Let's look at this question in chapter six, verse one.

What then are we to say?
Should we continue in sin
in order that grace may abound?

By no means!

Romans 6:1-2

This is the standard objection that is always brought up in the debate between law and grace: ***if grace frees people from the guilt of breaking the law...then we are going to have a lot more law breakers around here.*** This was an accusation that often dogged Paul's teachings, as it also dogged Martin Luther's reformation. The Catholic Church labeled Luther an **Antinomian** (one who is against the law) because they thought his "faith alone" statement would encourage people to be more sinful. And Luther responded to their criticism with these words, "***while we are saved by faith alone, we are not saved by faith that is alone.***" **True faith always and only follows true repentance:** recognizing our sinful condition and wishing to be freed from it.

Paul's answer to this objection that free grace would lead to sinful living was even more blunt. He said, *By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?*

Here Paul is using one of the strongest expressions he knows to make it clear that such sinful thinking has no place at all in the life of a genuine disciple of Jesus. And in typical Pauline fashion he will not let this challenge go until he has thoroughly explained why we, who are now united with Christ, should not be looking for ways to sin.

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

**we have been buried with him
by baptism into death,**
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.
(6:3-4)

And now here is the key verse in this passage – verse five.

For if we have been **united** with him in a death like his,
we will certainly be **united** with him in a resurrection like his.
Romans 6:5

The word translated “**united**” in this verse literally means “**having grown together,**” “**having become one with.**” It was used to describe two seeds that were sown into the same hole and thus sprouted, growing together as one plant not two separate plants. You can often see this same thing in a forest where two saplings that started life close together eventually grow into one tree, so entwined as to be inseparable.

This is an incredible picture of **the intimacy of our relationship with Jesus**, This is not some hoped for eventuality but a very present reality that is ours when we come to Christ in faith.

We receive the gift of his forgiveness, by effectively dying with him for our sins and equally so rising with him to “a new life” no longer under the power of sin (5:4).

Again, this is not wishful thinking but declared fact, as Paul twice emphasizes by using the word “**we know.**” (5:6 & 9). The rest of this chapter then is an explanation of how our union with Christ has completely changed our lives.

First, notice how often Paul uses **past tense verbs** to summarize **what happened to us at the very moment we put our faith in Jesus:**

we who died to sin... (v. 2)
were baptized... (v. 3)
We were buried... (v.4)

Our old self was crucified... (v. 6)
whoever has died... (v. 7)
we have died... (v. 8)

All but one of these verbs (“baptized”) deal with **death**. And every one of them is a **description of what has already occurred in our past**. This is true of all Christians. Paul does not say that we are currently dying to sin, nor is he exhorting us that we should be dying to sin. Paul says “**we have died to sin**” and **we were buried with Christ “so that we too might walk in newness of life”**(6:4).

Did you catch that? Not Christ alone but we also get to walk in newness of life!

So regardless of whether you know it or feel it, the fact is that **if you are a disciple of Jesus, you died the very moment that you put your faith in him.**

The reason that you died is **that your faith so closely united you with Jesus—having become one with him--that you have even shared in His death and now share in his life. Knowing this fact is the key to living for Jesus in the present.**

**If I really want to live for Jesus
I must first attend my own funeral**

And the best way for us to remember this fact is to attend our own funeral.

Now, obviously the kind of funeral I'm talking about is not a physical event, although there is one very important symbolic physical act that is a part of the process which we will get to in a moment. Instead, this is an event that takes place in our mind as indicated by Paul's expressions "***do you not know***" and "***we know***" that he uses three times in these verses.

So the key to being able to live for Jesus is to make sure **that we know** and understand **the impact that being united with the death and resurrection of Jesus now has on how sin operates in our lives.**

**HOW BEING UNITED WITH JESUS IMPACTS THE
OPERATION OF SIN IN MY LIFE**

1. In the past, I was set free from the penalty of sin

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Let's begin with verse 10. There Paul reminds us that **Jesus died to sin once for all**. Since we know that Jesus never sinned, what does Paul mean by that? We know that **on the cross, Jesus took all the sins of humanity upon himself**, as Paul reminded the church in Corinth...

For our sake [God] made him [Jesus]
to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in [Jesus]
we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

So Jesus temporarily took upon himself the sin of all mankind. And during that time, he was subject to the penalty and the power of sin; He would have to die. **But when sinless Jesus died on the cross, he satisfied the legal requirement for the penalty of our sin by paying that penalty on our behalf.** He did that "once for all" so that we don't have to do anything more to try and pay that penalty on our own.

But once dead, Jesus was no longer under the penalty of sin. And when He rose from the grave he then entered into a new life that was also no longer under the power of sin. And since we are united with him in his death and new life, **he also freed us from both the penalty and the power of sin.**

Augustus Toplady captured both aspects of this two-fold death to sin when he penned these words ...

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
**be of sin the double cure; save
from wrath and make me pure.***

The death and resurrection of Jesus is a double cure: it saves me from the wrath of God, the penalty, and it frees me from the power of sin, enabling me to live a new and righteous life before God.

That obviously does not mean that we become like Jesus in the sense that we no longer sin. But, through our union with Jesus, we have already gotten to that place where we are no longer under the penalty of sin. In our new life—again in union with Jesus, we can also be freed from the power of sin.

HOW BEING UNITED WITH JESUS IMPACTS THE OPERATION OF SIN IN MY LIFE

- 1. In the past, I was set free from the penalty of sin**
- 2. In the present, I am set free from the power of sin**

In verse 10, we see that Jesus not only died to sin once for all, but now in the present, "***the life he lives he lives to God***". That obviously does not mean that the life that Jesus lived prior to His death and resurrection was not lived to God. But the idea here is that **in the present, Jesus lives His life free from the cloud of our sin that was hung over Him right up until His death and resurrection.** And why this applies to us is explored further in verse six, where we read that:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that **we would no longer be enslaved to sin...**

Romans 6:6

So, when we are **united** to Jesus (when we become one with him), **we don't just add Jesus to our lives, like putting on an overcoat, but instead Jesus radically transforms us into completely new beings.** As Paul writes in verse four, "***so that we too might walk in newness of life***".

And that is why he wrote this to the Corinthian Christians

if anyone is in Christ,
there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

So the fact that we become a new creation in Christ means that our lives are completely transformed into ones that have a totally different character. And you'll notice once again that in this verse, **it is understood as fact, that anyone who is "in Christ" is a new creation.** Paul is not saying that we need to try and become a new creation--whether or not we feel any different--we have become a new creation. And, **one of the benefits of being a new creation is that we have been freed from the power of sin.**

Unfortunately, Paul's expression, "*our old self was crucified ... so that sin might be destroyed,*" has led some people to the mistaken idea that sin has been completely eradicated from their lives. But the verb Paul uses there means something more like "**sin has lost its ability to control**", which is consistent with the idea that **because we have been crucified with Christ, we are no longer enslaved to sin.** So, even though "growing together" with Jesus doesn't mean that sin has been eliminated from my life, it does mean that I am no longer under its power. I can now grow in righteousness as I grow up united with Jesus.

Thus we can conclude as Paul concludes:

So you also must consider
yourselves dead to sin
and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
Romans 6:11

But how does that work in the real world?

How has Jesus been able to free us from the power of sin so that we can now live a new life?

Martin Lloyd-Jones describes our changed relationship to sin in his analogy of the “two fields.”

Jones asks us to consider a typical British country scene, with two fields enclosed by high rock walls. Every person begins life in one of those fields—a field ruled by Satan and sin. We have no chance of scaling the walls and escaping the field on our own.

But, God, in his grace, reaches down and takes us out of that Satan-dominated field and sets us down in the adjacent field—a field ruled by Christ and by righteousness. A decisive change in our position has taken place—we are in a whole new relationship to sin.

We can still hear Satan calling across the wall from that old field where we used to live. And perhaps out of long habit, we sometimes still obey his voice, even though we don’t have to.

And in this new field, how do we grow in righteousness and overcome the power that sin had over us? By moving further and further away from the wall dividing the fields so that the voice of Satan grows fainter (*NIV Application Commentary*, Douglas Moo. Pages 207-8)

HOW BEING UNITED WITH JESUS
IMPACTS THE OPERATION OF SIN IN MY LIFE

1. In the past, I was set free from the penalty of sin
2. In the present, I am set free from the power of sin
3. In the future I will be set free from the presence of sin

3. And finally, in the future I will be set free from the presence of sin.

Although it is somewhat secondary to the main point Paul is making in this passage, verse five reveals that **because we have been united with Jesus in His death, we will also be united with Him in His resurrection.** It’s important to note the expressions Paul uses in verses five and eight, have now shifted from past to future tense: “***we will also live with him.***”

Every disciple of Jesus will one day, just like Jesus, experience a bodily resurrection in which we will receive physically resurrected bodies that will live forever in the presence of God. And at that point, we will finally be set free from the presence of sin.

**If I really want to live for Jesus
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So, if you wish to live for Jesus today, you must acknowledge the death of your old self. As we've seen, this funeral largely takes place in my mind when **I come to know and understand that being united with Jesus means that I was freed from the penalty of sin in the past, I am free from the power of sin in the present and I will be freed from the presence of sin in the future.**

Now, most of what I've shared so far is somewhat theological and theoretical and maybe not as practical as some of you would like. But without this foundation, we really couldn't make the following very practical applications for our life.

1. Don't use God's grace as permission to sin
2. Meditate often on what being united with Jesus means for my life
3. Testify to your union with Jesus by being baptized

1. Don't use God's grace as permission to sin

It would have been stupid on my part to presume that since a Bedford Police officer showed me grace the first time he was giving me permission to speed every other time I drive. And it would be just as stupid for a Christian to think, *"I'll go ahead and commit this sin intentionally because God has extended His grace to me in the past and He will forgive me again this time."* **We must not ever mistake God's grace for His tolerance of our sin.** Although God does promise to forgive the sins of those who have placed their faith in Jesus, that does not mean that He will always remove the consequences of our sins. Because God loves us so much and is so concerned with developing our holiness, He will discipline us for our sin, even severely if needed.

So the next time you're tempted to sin and find yourself thinking, "It's OK, God will forgive me," please, don't take that road, you will not like its consequences.

2. Think long, deep, and often on what being united with Jesus means for your life

As we saw earlier, in this section of his letter, Paul's main emphasis is on **what we are to know**. He is not so concerned here about our experiences or how we feel about these issues. **He wants us to know what it means to be "growing together" with Jesus. He wants us to understand the fact that we died to sin in the past and that we are free from the power of sin in the present.**

So this is a section of Scripture that we ought to read on a regular basis, one that we ought to chew on and consider how it should impact the way we live our lives.

3. If you haven't already done so, testify to your union with Jesus by being baptized

Therefore **we have been buried with him by baptism** into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

In verses three and four, Paul declares: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore **we have been buried with him by baptism** into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Although I don't think Paul is primarily referring to the physical act of water baptism here (*for sermon readers: see the concluding note on this*), there is little doubt that he took Jesus' command for all His disciples to be baptized very seriously. And frankly there is no better way I know that will serve as a life-long reminder of the fact that I am "growing together" with Jesus than as an adult, following that command to be baptized and doing so by immersion.

Here in this passage, Paul gives a clear picture of why baptism by immersion is an accurate depiction of our union with Jesus.

1. We go down into the water to symbolize the fact that we have died with Christ.
2. Then the brief time we stay under the water symbolizes being buried with Jesus.
3. And then coming up out of the water dramatically illustrates our being resurrected with Jesus, to a new life now dead to sin and alive to God.

This coming summer, we will have several confirmation students give testimony to their faith in Jesus, receive baptism and then join as members of this Church. And while our Church policy allows for baptism to be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, I know of at least one of the students who has already asked to be immersed.

So if that is something you've never done and you would like to be obedient to Jesus in that area of your life and experience a lifelong reminder of what it is to be—through baptism "*united with Jesus*" and "*raised to newness of life*" then please let me know. There are a lot of people in this world, even some who claim to be Christians, who believe that living a lifestyle of sin, is the most enjoyable way to live life. But God understands just how unfulfilling and destructive that kind of lifestyle is.

So He sent His Son to this earth to die on a cross and to rise from the grave to free us from both the penalty and the power of sin. Why then would we ever want to use that

grace as an excuse to return to a sinful life when the life we are offered in Jesus is so much better?

Let us pray. (3,406)

Note on Baptism:

The English word "**baptism**" is a transliteration (not a translation) of the underlying Greek word "*baptizo*" which means "**to immerse**" or "**to place into**" and by extension "**to wash**"

The New Testament uses "**baptize**" all these three ways. It can be used to simply describe the act of washing an item or it can refer to the act of **believer's baptism** (by which we publically declare ourselves as a follower of Jesus), or it can refer to the idea that at the time we place our faith in Jesus **we are immersed within, are placed into, the life of Jesus and His body the church.**

Although Romans six certainly has important implications for a believer's baptism, Paul is primarily concerned with the third aspect of baptism here. We are united with Christ because we have been immersed, placed into, the death and life of Christ.

So Paul is not referring to water baptism here, but rather to the idea that **when we place our faith in Jesus we take on a whole new identity by being immersed in Jesus.** Or as Paul also phrases it here in Romans six, "**we are united together with Him.**" At the point a person becomes a disciple of Jesus one becomes so deeply connected to Jesus, that he or she dies to sin in much the same way that Jesus did.

So if, in Romans six, we just replace the word "**baptize**" with the word "**immerse**" in these verses, it will make it much easier to understand what Paul is saying.