

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

Romans 6:1-23

Key Verse: 6:4

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

In chapter 5 we learned about the fruit of having a right relationship with God. It is an amazing blessing, more than we imagine. We have peace and gain free access to God. We can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We can rejoice even in our sufferings, because God uses them to help us grow in the image of Christ. God pours out these blessings from his unconditional love for us through Christ. God’s love is so powerful that it is effective eternally. God’s love gives us the assurance of our salvation. This is amazing grace. This grace was given through Christ’s one act of obedience. This grace is much greater than the power of sin. Paul explained that the law was added to increase the trespass. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign to bring life through Jesus Christ (5:20-21). God’s grace is so great. Yet, there is a danger of misunderstanding this grace, or even of abusing it.

In chapter 6 Paul asks rhetorical questions in verses 1 and 15. The first question is, **“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”** The answer is very clear: **“By no means!”** Then he explains the deep meaning of union with Christ through baptism. The second question is, **“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”** The answer is: **“By no means!”** Then he explains why in verses 16-23. The sinful nature in human beings is stronger and more devious than we may realize. It easily entangles us and hinders us from living a godly life. We are vulnerable to enticing temptations to enjoy sinful life, thinking that a holy life is too restrictive. But if we give in to temptation, we lose joy and peace, stop growing and become miserable. This can happen when we misunderstand God’s grace. God’s grace is deeper than we know. Let’s discover the deep meaning of God’s grace through today’s passage.

First, union with Christ (1-14). The first question starts, **“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”** The great doctrine of God’s grace can be misunderstood. It may be thought to undermine ethical responsibility and

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

to promote reckless sinning. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, the father lavished love upon his second son, who just returned from living a wild life. Then the first son many have felt that to receive grace he should go live a wild life too. And after receiving much grace, the second son may have become bored. He might have thought that if he lived a wild life again, he could receive more grace. It is so easy to take God's boundless love and amazing grace for granted and become presumptuous. Someone said, "God will surely forgive me. That's his job."¹ Against this presumption, Paul says very clearly, "**By no means!**" Then, he explains why.

Verse 2 says, "**We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?**" What does it mean that we have died to sin? Some argue that it means we become insensitive to sin, like a corpse.² However, this is incompatible with Paul's exhortation: "**do not let sin reign in your mortal body**" (12). How can a corpse reign? Furthermore, our experience tells us that far from being dead, our sinful nature is alive and active. Paul's point is that we are free from the power of sin because Christ paid sin's penalty once for all in our place (10). As a result, sin has no claim on us. We are freed from its power.

Paul tells us how we died to sin by explaining the spiritual meaning of baptism. Verse 3 says, "**Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**" Yesterday we had the beautiful baptism of Hannah Albright and Ire Suh. Baptism symbolizes being united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Going under the water signifies the death of the old person. Coming up out of the water signifies the birth of a new person. Baptism is more than a ceremony; it symbolizes union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It means that when Jesus was nailed to the cross for the sins of the world, my sins also died together with him. Therefore, since we died to sin, we cannot live in it any longer.

Let's read verse 4. "**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**" The purpose of union with Christ is not just termination of our sin, but to walk in newness

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/heinrich_heine_131088

² Vaughan, pp.117,123. Liddon, pp.108f. Sanday and Headlam, p. 155.

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

of life daily. New life is not boring at all. It is a totally transformed life with new thoughts, new words, and new deeds. It is very meaningful, awesome and exciting. Christ gives us new spirit, new hope and new vision so that we may live a vibrant and dynamic life. A few weeks ago, we heard the heartbreaking testimony of Miss Brooke Budzelini. Due to drug abuse, her family was in deep darkness. But Christ touched Brooke's heart through Bible study and she found new hope and vision. Now she is in Kenya as a short term missionary. Through the life of Christ in her, her family has new hope! There was a man named Christmas Evans. He was born on December 25, 1766 in Wales. His father died while he was young. So Christmas lived with an uncle who was an alcoholic. Without any moral or spiritual training, he lived a wild life and was often involved in fights. In one such fight, he lost his right eye. At the age of 17, he heard the gospel, repented, and surrendered his life to Christ. He learned to read and write and became an avid Bible student, and later a dynamic preacher, known for Spirit-filled messages. After a life of full devotion to Christ, his last words were, "Life is the only cure for death... new, spiritual, divine life."³

Verse 5 says, **"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his."** The purpose of being united with him in his death is for our old self to be crucified with him (6). So we are no longer slaves to sin, but set free from its power (7). Here **"old self"** refers to the unregenerate self in Adam. This is the sinful, self-centered nature. This old self is hostile to God. Only when this old self dies can the new self in Christ be born. We should firmly believe that this old self has died with Christ and we should not be attached to the old self. As the MercyMe song goes, we should say, "So long self..."⁴

Verse 8 says, **"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."** Those who died with Christ are also resurrected with Christ and live with him forever. How is it possible? It is because of Christ's resurrection. Christ's resurrection is different from that of Lazarus, who had to die again. Christ cannot die again because he defeated the power of death completely (9). Having been raised from the tyranny of death, he has passed beyond its jurisdiction forever. The glorified Lord Jesus declares: **"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And**

³ Wiersbe, Warren W., *50 People Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Spiritual Giants of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), p.53-58.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/So_Long_Self

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18). In the past, the power of death strongly ruled over us and caused us to suffer under the fear of death, emptiness and meaninglessness. It made us slaves to a fateful destiny. Because of this, we lived dark, negative and fatalistic lives. Christ, however, defeated the power of death through his resurrection and grants us resurrection life. Now, those who are united with Christ are free from the power of death and can live life to the full.

Paul summarizes the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection in verse 10: **“The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”** John Stott explains this contrast: “There is a difference of time (the past event of death, the present experience of life), of nature (he died to sin, bearing its penalty, but lives to God, seeking his glory), and of quality (the death ‘once for all,’ the resurrection life continuous).”⁵ By being united with Christ in his death and resurrection through baptism, our old life terminated with its judicial death and our new life began with a resurrection.

In verses 1-8, the words **“with him”** are important. Sometimes it is hard for us to resist the pattern of this world which is ungodly and wicked. Peer pressure is strong. The environment we encounter in school and at the workplace is often anti-Christian. We wonder how we can survive and raise our children well. The words **“with him”** tell us that we have an ongoing relationship **“with him.”** He is our source of strength and wisdom to overcome all challenges. He trains us to say “no,” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age and makes us eager to do good (Titus 2:12,14). He will also help our children to overcome the world and live godly lives. When we are with Jesus, we can do more than just survive; we can thrive and live victoriously. We are not like dead fish floating down the stream. We are like steelhead salmon who can swim against the current and jump up waterfalls.

In verses 1-10, Paul began this teaching by saying **“Don’t you know?”** (3). Also, he said **“we know”** (6,9), and **“we believe”** (8). It is indeed important for us to know why Jesus died and rose again from the dead. This is the core of the gospel. But knowing is not enough. We need to apply what we

⁵ Stott, John W., *Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), p.178.

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

know to our practical lives. Paul exhorts us in verses 11-14. Verse 11 says, **“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”** The word **“count”** is a commercial term which refers to keeping records of accounts. When we pay a debt, our obligation ends, and we are free from the debt. This is how we should view our old self. We should put it in the **“dead”** category. And also, we regard our new self in the **“alive”** category. **“Count”** is an imperative; it means we must intentionally see ourselves through the gospel. We should not reminisce about our old self or have any relationship with our old self. We live only in the new self. Paul said, **“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Eph 4:22-24). He also testified, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”** (Gal 2:20).

Verses 12-14 show how we should live practically. Fundamentally, we have received forgiveness of sins and were set free from sin. Yet, the vestige of sin remains. We are like the Israelites who were set free from Pharaoh's bondage by the power of God but retained a slave mentality. For instance, though some people were saved from selfishness, they still act selfishly. It takes time for the elements of sin to be overcome, just as one who has been healed through major surgery requires physical therapy and a long recovery period. We need to fight against our sinful nature throughout our lifetime. We are weak; therefore, we sometimes fall. But whenever we fall, we should depend on God's grace and stand up and fight against our sinful desires again. When we continue to struggle without giving up, the Holy Spirit helps us to make our inner person strong and grow to be like Jesus.

In verses 12-13 Paul exhorts us both in a negative and positive aspect. What we should not do is to let sin reign in our mortal bodies so that we obey its evil desires. In the past, we followed evil desires: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jn 2:16). When we did so, we became instruments of wickedness. Instead of giving in to sin, we should offer our bodies positively to God as instruments of righteousness. We should do so with gratitude and a joyful heart as if we have received our lives back as a great gift. Since we are alive to God, it is only appropriate that we should

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

offer our bodies to him. Here, ‘**bodies**’ means not only hands and feet, eyes and ears, but also thoughts, talents and so on. It means our entire life and everything we do. We should do everything for God rather than for ourselves. We have turned 180 degrees, from living a self-centered life to a Christ-centered one. Now we should do everything for the glory of God, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do (1Cor 10:31).

Also, “**instrument**” means tool. Its use varies depending on the one who uses it. While a knife may be used to give life, as when a surgeon uses a scalpel, it can also be used to kill, as when a murderer uses a switchblade. Likewise, if we offer our bodies to sin, they become instruments of wickedness. On the other hand, if we offer them to God, they become instruments of righteousness. Therefore, it is very important to whom we offer ourselves. There is no gray area in the spiritual world. Verse 14 explains why we should offer ourselves to God. It is because sin shall not reign over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace. Here we can find the secret of overcoming our sinful desires. We don’t need to lead an ascetic life like a monk in order to overcome our sinful desires. We don’t need to condemn ourselves. All we have to do is offer ourselves to God.

Second, live as servants of Christ (15-23). In verse 15 a second question is raised: “**Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?**” Since we are no longer under the power of sin, it seems that we can sin freely because it has no consequence. That is a deception. Paul deals with this issue by giving the analogy of slavery and appealing to practical experience. Verse 16 says, “**Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey - whether you are slaves of sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?**” We may think that since we are free from the power of sin, we can control it. However, once we give in to sin, we cannot control what happens. Naturally we become slaves of sin. That is why Jesus said, “**Everyone who sins is a slave to sin**” (Jn 8:34). We either become slaves to God or slaves to sin. The consequences are quite different. Slavery to sin leads to death while slavery to God leads to righteousness. Paul thanked God for the believers in Rome that though they used to be slaves to sin, they had come to obey the word of God from their hearts and were thus set from sin and became slaves to righteousness (17-18).

UNITED WITH CHRIST FOR NEW LIFE

Though Paul uses the analogy of slavery, it cannot fully explain our relationship with God. God is not like a human master. Paul simply wants to explain the reality that we have to choose which master to serve. Then he reminds them of their practical experience. In the past, when they offered themselves as a slave to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, the result was overwhelming shame and death (19,21). Also, they were free from the control of righteousness (20). They lost spiritual power and desire. However, now that they have been set free from sin they can offer themselves as slaves of God. The benefit they reap is holiness and the result is eternal life (22). Although sin is enticing and looks like fun, it leads to the most miserable consequence: death. On the other hand, being a slave to God may seem to restrict us and take away our fun. However, the outcome is holiness and eternal life. It is the most abundant, fruitful and happy life. Paul concludes: **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (23). Sin pays wages, that is, what we deserve: death. However, God gives a free gift, that we do not deserve, that is: union with God eternally.

Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead. This is the gospel. When we simply believe the gospel, and are united with Christ, we are free from the power of sin and death. God’s new life lives in us and we can live a vibrant and dynamic life. This is amazing grace of God. God’s grace is not cheap grace, but costly grace. When we know the deep meaning of God’s grace, we cannot abuse this grace. Rather, we offer ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Then we can grow in holiness and fully enjoy the gift of eternal life, bearing good fruit.