



## Union With Christ

Romans 6:1-14 | Mar 8, 2020

For the first time in the Book of Romans, Paul introduces the idea of being *in Christ*. This is a massive theme, at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. In fact the New Testament only ever uses the word “Christian” about three times. But “in Christ” and “in him” occur almost 200 times. Union with Christ is what salvation by grace, and justification by faith, effect. And that is why Paul finds the idea of casually continuing in sin, post-conversion, to be so repugnant. Super-abounding grace (5:20) inevitably leads to transformation, even if it comes slowly. Change is a function of our union with Christ—a union which consists of at least three things:

### A Reality to Experience

As surely as we were “in Adam” when he sinned, we were “in Christ” when he died on the cross. His death was our death. *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* Yes, we were there. “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). Jesus lived as our representative and died as our substitute. Theologians call this “vicarious substitution,” and we experience it vicariously—just as a movie can make your heart race and your muscles tense as someone else’s actions produce real effects in you. Baptism is our corresponding experience to Christ’s death on the cross for us (Rom. 6:3-4).

### An Identity to Embrace

Paul says, “our old self was crucified with him” (6:6). Literally, “our old man.” It’s not just our autobiographical past that dies—the sin, guilt, and shame of our personal lives—it’s our whole *fallen humanity in Adam* that dies. That ancestry, that archetype, is gone. A new identity may be embraced. “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

This is the first command given in Romans! All that came before were indicatives—what is simply true about us and God. Only now does Paul give us an imperative, and it is basically this: Embrace your new identity! And we do that by *considering* or *counting* or *reckoning*—the very same word used of God with regard to our faith: He *considers...counts...reckons* our faith as righteousness!

### A Counterinsurgency to Engage

If embracing our new identity is the first command of the gospel, we might say that going to war is the second. Romans 6:12-14 are laced with military language. Sin and Death have been deposed as despot rulers. Jesus is Lord now. But surely sin will counterattack. It will try to exploit the one great area of our lives that has not yet been resurrected or fully redeemed: our bodies.

We are new spiritual beings living in old, sin-ridden bodies. We have neural pathways trained for years to think selfish, devious, unbelieving thoughts. We have desires bent on self-gratification; bodies habituated to sin. Our members—our brains, mouths, eyes, ears, hands, feet, and sex organs—can be *weapons* (that’s the proper translation of the word) serving either side. Weapons of unrighteousness or weapons of righteousness.

In true military fashion, Paul issues the divine order: “Present arms!” (Compare Romans 12:1-2.) Bring your body, and all its faculties, to God for noble, good, redemptive purposes. Fight sin in yourself—and do it by fighting the good fight of faith in the world. As the Puritan John Owen famously said, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” And do it by faith because we are not under Law but under Grace!

## Discussion Guide

1. Read Romans 6:1-14
2. When you hear the term, “union with Christ,” what do you think about? What does that term mean to you?
3. If you were to try to explain “union with Christ” as the great theme and concept at the center of Christianity—if you were to try to explain that to an unbeliever—what would you say?
4. Process the main points of the sermon:

### **A Reality to Experience**

- Romans 6 says that we were buried with Christ by baptism into death. How literally do you think we should take that?
- As a rule, would you agree that we’re too “cerebral” in our faith, too heady and intellectual? Why or why not?
- What correctives do you wish we could collectively bring to make our faith a richer, fuller reality?

### **An Identity to Embrace**

- Romans 6 says our old self was crucified with Christ, so now we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Have you experienced a change in your identity as a result of trusting Christ? In what way? How would you describe it?
- People often use the term “identify as...” to describe their ethnicity or sexuality, and often that’s the deepest definition of themselves that they know. What does it mean to you to “identify as Christian”?
- The Puritan, John Owen, said that pastors face two basic problems: Convincing unbelievers that they are enslaved to sin (and thus in need of a Savior), and convincing believers that they’re not. Do you ever struggle to believe that you’re truly new in Christ...truly justified...truly free from sin’s dominion? Explain.

### **A Counterinsurgency to Engage**

- In the name of “grace” many Christians downplay efforts to fight sin, calling it “legalism.” But in the sermon we were reminded that Grace is not against *effort*, but against *earning*. Explain that. What does that line mean?
- How is it helpful to think of our bodies and faculties as *weapons*?
- What is one mental, emotional, or physical function that you need to bring back into obedience to God? What is one practical way in which this passage is calling you to, “*Present arms!*”?
- Share your challenges in the fight against sin, and pray for one another.