



BURIED WITH CHRIST

ROMANS 6:1-7

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INTRODUCTION

Good morning, my name is Kyle Rodriguez, I'm one of the pastors here at Union Church. It is my privilege to preach the Word to you this morning.

Well, the meaning of names has kind of dwindled in our community, hasn't it?

My wife, Ashley, and I had the hardest time thinking of a name for our son—just because we had different tastes! Just complete opposite tastes in names. And so, when we finally landed on the name Judah, we were just grateful to agree on something.

And after he was born, we introduced him to some friends and family, and I remember the first time someone asked me: "Oh, Judah, what does that mean?" And I totally blanked! Ashley and I really appreciate the way Judah is redeemed in Genesis, how Christ is the lion of Judah, born of the tribe of Judah, but we had really overlooked what the name actually meant in its original language! And I kind of panicked, like, oh no, what have we done! Fortunately, Judah means praise, or thanksgiving, in Hebrew, so the Lord was really looking out for us.

Now, fortunately, a bit more thought did go into the naming of Union Church. And today, we are going to be starting a series that dives into the foundation behind the name "Union" church. We're going to spend the next three weeks talking about the doctrine of "Union with Christ."

SERIES INTRODUCTION - UNION WITH CHRIST

Now, this is a concept that, for me, growing up in the church, wasn't something we talked about a lot. We talked a lot about grace, and about mercy, about justification, about being saved through Jesus, about following Jesus. But I didn't hear the language of being "united to Jesus."

And yet, if you start to read church history, start to read the great theologians from the Early Church to the Reformation, it becomes very clear that the church has recognized this reality, from Orthodox Christians to Catholics to Protestants, as central to the Christian faith.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the great Christian preachers of the 20th century, said that union with Christ is the "real thing" of Christianity, that nothing less than "union with Christ" can truly be considered Christianity.

So, what is union with Christ? That's what we're asking over the next few weeks.

Well, we're going to dive into one specific text in just a moment, but before we do that, I want to show you where we get this idea of Union with Christ. It's littered all over the New Testament, but not always in those exact words.

One really core phrase that's used in the New Testament is that we are "in Christ." The phrase "in Christ" or "in him" is used more than 160 times in the New Testament. In fact, we saw at our Bible study this past week that Paul starts off his letter to the Philippians like he does many of his letters, by calling them "saints in Christ." In fact, Paul never uses the term "Christian" for the Church or for himself, but calls them (and himself) men and women "in Christ."

In Ephesians 1, Paul uses that phrase to show us that every benefit of Jesus comes to Christians by being "in Christ." God has blessed us "in Christ", he chose us "in him", he has blessed us with grace "in the Beloved", we have redemption and forgiveness "in him", we have obtained an inheritance "in him," we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit "in him."

But the Bible also talks about how Christ is "in us." Look at this verse in Galatians, for example:

Galatians 2:20 - "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."

This last passage from Colossians shows how these two phrases could be used side-by-side:

Colossians 1:27-29 - "27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

So, these phrases, that we are in Christ and Christ is in us, were part of the common vocabulary of the early church, and what is very clear, once you see this in the New Testament is that it is EVERYWHERE. If you attended one of our Bible Studies this week in Philippians, we talked about how this concept was woven in the background of the passage we read this week, even if it wasn't explicitly laid out in a systematic way.

Friends, union with Christ is not just part of the gospel. Union with Christ *is* the gospel. It is the cornerstone of our identity, the doorway to all of the benefits Christ, from beginning to end, from the lowest foundation to the highest peaks of salvation, to be Christian is to be united to Christ.

We're going to move into our specific passage, for today. **But before we do that, let's pray.**

TEXT

Now, I am going to read through our text for this morning, and then I am going to say, as we do every week: “This is the Word of the Lord,” and you will respond with: “Thanks be to God.” This is one way that we remind ourselves, habitually, how gracious God has been to reveal himself to us by his Word.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

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. 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. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

This is the Word of the Lord.

[All] Thanks be to God.

UNION: BURIED WITH CHRIST

Now, we are going to actually spend two weeks on this passage, because there are two elements of “union with Christ” that this passage really dwells on, and both are critical to our understanding of what it means to be in Christ and for Christ to be in us.

This morning, we’re going to look at what it means to be “buried with Christ,” and next week, Pastor Ethan is going to tackle what it means to be “raised with Christ.” And I have to tell you, you’re not going to want to miss that.

But today, we are going to ask ourselves what Paul means by the fact that we have been “buried with Christ”. And if you are a note-taker at all, here is our main point for today:

[Main Point]

Because we have been united to Christ in his death, we are no longer slaves.

BURIED WITH CHRIST: FREE FROM GUILT (Justification)

Okay, so let's start by looking at this theme of "dying" with Christ that Paul is using here.

- Verse 2: "we died to sin"
- Verse 3: "we have been baptized into Christ's death"
- Verse 4: "we were buried with him, into death"
- Verse 5: "we have been united with him in death"
- Verse 6: "our old self was crucified with him"
- Verse 8: "we have died with Christ"

Paul is really hitting home: You have died with Christ!

But, Paul doesn't really explain that phrase. It's kind of a funny phrase, we haven't died, if we had, then Paul writing this letter but for Paul, it's assumed that whoever is reading this letter, be it the Church in Rome who he was originally writing to or to us today, it's assumed that the reader will agree: Yes, we have died with Christ.

So, what does Paul mean by that? That Christians have "died with Christ"?

Well, when I have a question like that, quite often, I'll go back in my Bible, and I'll look for the ways that similar words and phrases are used by the same author. So, you can flip in your Bibles through the book of Romans, or you can go to a place like BibleGateway.com and search: for the words "death, dying, die, died" just in the book of Romans.

And I won't take you through the whole book of Romans, but in short, here is what I've found:

- In Romans 1, Paul says that the "wrath of God" is against all the ungodly, he says in Romans 1:32 that "God's decree is that those who [sin] deserve to die." He goes on to say in Romans 6 that the "wages of sin is death."
 - So, the first thing we see is that for Paul, death is the natural, just outcome of sin. Sin leads to death. And not just physical death, but spiritual death, being separated from God, because we have made ourselves his enemies. Paul goes on to say that this is the state of every single person, no matter their ethnicity, no matter their age, no matter their wealth or privilege, everyone has sinned and fallen short. And thus, everyone is condemned. Dead men walking. Enemies of God.
- But, then Paul goes on, and he pens this glorious paragraph in Chapter 5:

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were

still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Okay, now we're cooking with gas! We saw how Paul understood death in general, but clearly he sees Jesus's death as radically different and unique: Jesus died not for his own sins, but FOR the ungodly. He died in the place of the ungodly, he died "for us." He died to justify us, to make us right before God, he died to reconcile us to God. The wrath of God that was reserved for sin, the wages of sin that must be paid out, Jesus Christ took all that on in our place in order to reconcile us to God. The penalty has been paid. Justice is fulfilled.

But how does that work?

One example that Christians often use is a courtroom example. Imagine you were arrested and tried for murder, and you got to the end of the trial, and the judge pronounces you guilty. And as he lays down the sentence of capital punishment, Jesus bursts into the room and offers to go in your place. And the judge says: "Okay, go free!"

Now, many of us have heard that kind of explanation of the cross enough times that that story doesn't sound strange to us. But friends, by itself, that story doesn't paint a story of justice. It paints a story of an innocent man being killed and a murderer walking free. An innocent person dying, by itself, doesn't change the reality that *you* murdered that person and deserve punishment.

And this is where union with Christ comes in.

Because Christ did not merely offer to take your place as a random intercessor, something much more miraculous happened. He actually united you to himself. He so closely identified himself with you that he didn't just take your punishment, but he took your sin itself, he took your guilt. He, in effect, took you up into his person and became responsible for your sin, responsible for every thing you've ever done. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul uses this remarkable phrase that Jesus, a man who knew no sin, "became sin" for our sake.

So, friends, when Jesus dies on the cross, it is as if you died. And do you know what that means, friends? It means your guilt has died.

You know, friends, at this point in my Christian walk, I am sensitive to my own sin. I feel them. And on one hand, that's a good thing, that's the Holy Spirit at work in me to convict me. But on the other hand, it is really easy for me to get stuck in patterns of guilt and shame over my sin. Even though I know that my heavenly Father has forgiven me, even though I know that Christ died for me, it feels as if that forgiveness is too easy! It almost feels like if I don't feel miserable

enough for my sin, if I don't *do* something to make up for my sin, then I won't really deserve forgiveness. It's like I still have something to pay.

Friends, maybe you have felt similarly at times. Perhaps you've been racked by guilt, you've come to the Father and asked for forgiveness, you know in your head that you are forgiven, but you can't shake that guilt and that shame, that sense that you still need to pay.

Oh, brothers and sisters, have you forgotten that you have been united to Christ? You have already paid! You paid in Christ, on the cross! His death really was the death of your sinful, broken, evil self. His punishment, really was your punishment. You might not have physically been up on that cross, feeling the pain, but Christ has made you a part of him, and in him your guilt is dead and buried.

You have no business digging up what Christ has buried. Leave that guilt in the grave where it belongs! It no longer has claim on you!

Now, conviction? Conviction has claim on you. The Holy Spirit has claim on you, we'll talk more about that in the coming weeks. Repentance, that part of you isn't dead. But if you feel that conviction, then run to Father, clothed in the name of Jesus, ask for his forgiveness based on the infinitely worthy death of Christ, and believe that you really have it! You have died with Christ!

BURIED WITH CHRIST: FREE FROM SIN (Sanctification)

Now, all that? That reality of our dying with Christ means that our guilt is buried in the grave, that is actually not in our text for this morning. But it's underneath it. It's the foundation for this whole theme of dying with Christ.

But it's not actually the primary reason Paul brings up the phrase here and now. The reason Paul reminds the Romans here that they died with Christ is because sometimes, that message of grace gets twisted into a license for guiltless sin.

That's what Paul is responding to in verse 1: "What shall we say then? If we are free from guilt, if every sin we commit is paid for, should we just keep sinning, so the forgiveness and grace of God is even bigger and grander?" **And we've all been there. We've all been to lunch with somebody, found out they were paying, and were a little tempted to ask for a double portion of meat on our burrito bowl. After all, it would make their generosity look even better!**

And, actually, this is something that Paul was accused of by some of his Jewish critics: They said if you just preach this message of grace and forgiveness, what motivation will people have to stop sinning?

And to this Paul says: “Should we keep on sinning, so grace abounds all the more? By no means!”

Because for Paul, being united to Christ in his death means more than just our guilt being buried. It also means that our sin is buried.

Look at how Paul talks here, in verse 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

This is critical! Do you see what Paul is doing here? Paul is opening up the door on the reason, the end goal, for why our union with Christ includes dying with him. And what does he say? That we might die to sin itself, that sin’s hold over us would be vanquished.

Friends, if we have died with Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. You were a citizen under the kingdom of Satan, every part of you were addicted to the poisonous allure of sin, you were gripped in the grasp of your flesh’s desire, you were under the dominion of sin has died. But sin is no longer your master!

But, this brings up a bit of a conundrum. Because even though we are dead to sin, even though the old man in us has died up on the cross--deservedly and finally--with Christ, all of us know that even as Christians, we still sin. Paul actually bemoans this very fact in chapter 7 of Romans, just a little while longer. You know it, I know it, we still sin.

In fact, oftentimes, it might still seem like we are still slaves! We see the ways we continue to fall short. Over and over again, we lash out in anger against our friends, our family, our neighbors. Over and over again, we slip into gossip and ridicule amongst our co-workers. Over and over again we fall to lust and addiction, pornography and the bottle. We succumb to selfishness and fear, over and over again, and we hate it! If I have died to sin, why does this keep happening??

It’s interesting, prisons and community action groups have done a number of studies over the last 25 years or so on the effect that jails have on prisoners called “post-incarceration syndrome.” And it’s this phenomenon that happens especially amongst people who spent many years in prison, where when they are set free, the freedom is actually overwhelming to them. The lack of structure in their schedules leads to confusion and anxiety. One hundred different choices for food instead of one leads to panic attacks. Trusting other people is so difficult that many ex-prisoners end up in a sort of solitary confinement of their own choosing. They become, in a word, “institutionalized.” They have grown comfortable in their chains, dependent, even. So, despite being free as any other, they remain trapped in self-constructed prisons.

And I think that’s a little bit like what happens to us, friends. The old self, the flesh, becomes so institutionalized to sin that it continues to have a hold of us, even from the grave. We have become so used to the rhythms of our addictions, that we fall back into the same grooves, so jaded from our past failures, that hope of something new seems impossible.

But friends, that old you has died. They died with Christ, and they were buried in the ground, and that is where they must stay! You have been set free from sin, it has no dominion over you. Look at me: Stop digging up what Christ has slain! You're free!

So, how do we do it?

Well, I think we get some hints from Paul here.

It starts with a mind shift: look what Paul says in verse 11: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Friends, do you really consider yourselves dead to sin? Do you really believe that sin no longer has dominion over you? Do you really see your primary identity as someone who is dead to sin, who has been made alive to Christ, or do you primarily see yourself as someone who is trying your best? Do you see yourself as a sinner who is trying to slowly work your way into being a better Christian?

Brothers and sisters, trying your best won't cut it. Working your way into holiness doesn't work!

Only Christ can make you holy! Only he can kill that sin and bury it in the ground! You have to first be united to Christ in his death by putting your faith in him, and then recognize that your identity is no longer an inmate in the prison of your sin! You are a free citizen of the kingdom of Jesus! And until you start seeing yourself as one, that sin that is supposed to be buried in the grave is going to keep reaching a hand up and tripping you up.

But once you've made a mind shift, Paul has more for you:

I think verse 12 and 13 almost give us a two-step plan to living out the identity shift he commanded in verse 11.

Verse 12, Paul says: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions."

- Don't let sin reign. Sin is no longer the rightful ruler over your body, Jesus is.
 - So, we start to rebel against sin's rule in a lot of ways, but we have start somewhere. We have to start by saying no to one sin. It sounds simple, but say no once. Break the cycle of tyranny with one no to sin, in the power of Jesus.
- When the impulse comes:
 - To visit that website
 - To lash out in anger
 - To indulge in that selfishness
 - To think the worst of your brother or sister in Christ and be bitter

- The next time that impulse comes, say no. Make one small act of rebellion against the reign of sin. And let that small act, by the power of Christ in you, snowball into another, and another and another.

But then, look at verse 13: “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

We’re going to talk more about this next week, how God does not just save us from something negative, but for something infinitely positive! If we only focus on *not* doing something, eventually, we’ll just burn out and give up, the Christian life becomes all about “avoiding things.” But friends, God didn’t merely save you from sin, he saved you for the most meaningful, purposeful life you could possibly have.

And the more we live into the things God has prepared for us to do, the easier it will be for us to live the dead reign of sin behind. So, we’re going to talk more about that next week, but think about that this week: How can you present yourself to God as instruments for righteousness, for his glory, for his people’s good? Pray about that this week.

UNION: UNITED TO EACH OTHER IN OUR BURIAL

Now, there is one more aspect of our union with Christ that is particularly applicable to us as a brand new church. And that is the reality that not only are we united with Christ alone, but we are united to ALL whom Christ has united himself! We are united to one another, because together, we are the body of Christ.

He has made us into one, into a people, into a family.

And that means that not only does our union with Christ leave us with individual applications, but with corporate applications. So, over the next three weeks, we don’t want to leave these sermons without asking the question: What does this mean for *us*?

Potential Application:

1. Because Christ has buried our guilt, we can leave our brother and sister’s guilt buried.
2. Because we are united to one another, we can mortify sin together.