

Union and New Life

Romans 6:1-11

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One of my early jobs was working for a local carwash. The owner of the carwash was also a used car salesman, if you will. He would refinish a few cars and have them sitting out by the road. One of those was a 1986 Nissan Sentra, five-speed, that had my name written all over it. In South Carolina, scary enough, you could get your learner's permit at fourteen. You could have your driver's license at sixteen. So I had been driving my parents' Toyota wagon with the fake wood side paneling. I love wagons. I've returned to them today. But it just wasn't my speed. It didn't fit the vibe. But I didn't think much about it. And on my seventeenth birthday, I went home and went into our kitchen. I had only been a Christian a year. I'd been caught lying, and so I didn't know if I would be trusted again. But we'd work to reevaluate the trust, and it was my birthday. So I didn't know what was going to happen.

So my parents said, "Could you go and get something from the garage?" So I did. I opened up the door to the garage, and there that Nissan Sentra sat. In complete disbelief, I was like, "Really?" You know? And sure enough, I had no clue how to drive a five-speed. So my dad took me out to my old elementary school and gave me a two-hour lesson on how to drive a five-speed. They then summarily packed their bags and left for the weekend. They gave me a new car, and they left for the weekend. Oh, boy. So we sat down and, you know, we had to talk about insurance and all this stuff. And it was amazing that God would enable me to have this car, shiny and red. It was really cool. I put a sticker on it that weekend. Put my favorite music into it, U2. It was great. They were gone, and I learned how to drive that car on my own. Almost threw out the clutch, but managed.

But imagine for just a moment that on my birthday, my parents called me into the kitchen and they said, "Randy, we want you to see this sheet of paper." And the sheet of paper is from State Farm. And at the top of that State Farm paper, it says, "car insurance." They would read through that whole insurance policy, what was covered, liability, collision, all that stuff. And they said, "Isn't this great? Your name is now on my car insurance." And I'm like, "Yeah!" And then they would hand me a key to a car, open up the car door to the garage, and there would sit a car rusted out with four flat tires, and completely could not run. Imagine if what they gave me was great auto insurance with a car that could not run.

Do you know that for many Christians, that's precisely how we live the Christian life? God has given us this great insurance plan, that Jesus Christ died for me, his blood was poured out on Calvary, I have received forgiveness—a great insurance plan. And yet oftentimes, many Christians fail to see that on the other side of that is not just an insurance plan but a car that can actually run. God intends for us to have more than just justification, declared as righteous before God through Jesus Christ. He intends for us to have more than just forgiveness. He actually intends for us to have new life. He wants us to have both. Do you know that you have been given both forgiveness and new life, justification and sanctification? This is a part of the vital aspect of being renewed in the gospel. That union with Christ is new life. Let's look at Romans 6:1-11.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be

united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Now, Lord, we ask that you would open our eyes and enable our hearts, our whole lives, to receive the full blessing of the gospel that is the power of God—literally, it is the dynamite of the Lord Jesus, that he changes everything. Lord, help us to receive this gift—not just justification, but sanctification. Not just forgiveness, but new life, that we might walk in it. But Lord, unless you bring us this power, we have only one half of the gospel, and therefore we don't have the full gospel and are walking in foolishness and blindness. Help us, Lord, then, to see Christ and our union with him. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus has come. He has come to give us new life. But oftentimes, perhaps, Christians—we, as Christians—maybe if you don't even know Christ, I would scarcely say you too struggle with an impoverished imagination towards God, a confusion towards our own circumstance that oftentimes is the result of gross misinformation. We stop oftentimes at Good Friday, but scarcely do we understand what it means to live in the resurrection. Union and new life. We've been talking about these doctrines of gospel renewal. We began by looking at justification. We also looked at adoption, of what it means to be called children of God. But now, inseparably connected to the work of justification and adoption—being made children of God through Jesus Christ—is also this next gift, and that is sanctification. Though that word does not appear here in this text, it is represented by the phrase “new life.”

And so I want for you, I want for me, I want for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be received in its full-orbed beauty, in the greatness of the imagination of the Scriptures, that God has done through Jesus Christ far more than we could ever ask or imagine, that he gives us forgiveness and new life. We can have both. So let's look at it together. In this passage, we'll look at verses one through eleven. And we'll begin by looking at verses one through five, and that is full union. And then six through eleven, the implications of union. And it's all intricately connected, but for the sake of organization, there you go—full union, and the implications of union.

First, this full union. Why does Paul discuss these issues? It is because Paul has been talking about—that justification, being made right before God, can never be merited, but only received as a gift through the work of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, who through his body and his blood served as a perfect sacrifice for sin and reunites us to God through his work, and therefore we are received as children. And this has absolutely nothing to do with our effort. We cannot merit it. We cannot work for it. And so the question arose—then, are you saying, Paul, shall we go on sinning, that God's grace may increase? If we are received by God through grace through the work of Jesus Christ and not of our own, does that mean if grace abounds where sin abounds—in fact, it tells us that grace super-abounds where sin abounds—are you suggesting that we should go on sinning? Of course, Paul begins this chapter with the question—no. Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means.

And then he says, “we died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?” And then he begins to explain, what does this new life look like. And he begins with this beautiful picture of full union. Verses three through five, he tells us, as he says there, “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized”—and the Greek word there, *baptizo*—“into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” First, this idea of full union is we are united to Christ in death. And the word there used that is translated as baptism is *baptizo*, literally to be drowned into, to be sunk under. But he never mentions the word “water.” But the

implication is drawn about in the idea that being united to Christ in his death literally means to be sunk into the waters that bring cleansing—that in Jesus' death and the giving of his body and blood, our sins are washed away completely and utterly, separated as far from us as the east is from the west.

And he says, "We are baptized into Christ Jesus. We are baptized into his death. We were therefore"—the implications, he says here, of being drawn into this union with the death of Christ is we were "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." So the challenge here that is many times the cross, the gospel, is often seen in what we call the four-chapter gospel. But many Christians stop short of the four chapters. They begin with, yes, I believe that I'm created by God, that because I am a sinner, I fell from the original created order that God had ordained. I fell, and Christ came on the cross, and I was redeemed. And we stop there. I'm a sinner, and I was redeemed—meaning forgiveness. And that's where we stop. And there's so much misinformation out there that oftentimes it's believed either nakedly or quietly and subconsciously that Jesus gets us about seventy percent along the way. The rest of it is done on our own power. That first seventy percent, got it. My sins are cleansed. I have a ticket to heaven. But the way I get from here to there is under my own steam, under my own strength.

So Paul says here, clearly, we are clearly justified. We are clearly united with Christ in his death, meaning his burial, meaning it is finished. The price for sin is done. The wrath of God has been poured out. Christ has received it. Done. But then he says, "This was done in order that," he tells us, "order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." That's the second half of the union. United to him in his death, united with him in his resurrection. United with him in his resurrection. And that means that just as surely as the one who raised Christ from the dead is also the one that raises us to new life—not under our own strength, but by the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is also the very one that raises us. That being in full union with Christ, it is the Spirit that enables us to see the work of him who has died for us. And it is the same Spirit that also raises us to a new identity, a new reality, a new understanding, a new approach to life—not under our own steam. It is all gift—death and resurrection, forgiveness and sanctification. It is empowered by God in the beginning. It is empowered by God all the way through. It is empowered by God when Christ comes again. And those who believe in Christ will be raised in new glory. All of it, one hundred percent of the way through, is a gift.

Why is it, then, that so many Christians live as though we stop at Good Friday? Partly because we don't know how to walk in new life. We don't understand the implications of it. We're confused by it. There's so much misinformation about it, which is why we need to talk about the implications of union. As Paul has begun to unpack these themes in this passage, he goes on to then unpack them again and understand the implications. And here is the reality—I want to say this—you cannot be a Christian if all we understand is that Christ died to give me forgiveness. We cannot separate sanctification, new life, from justification. To separate them is to make it not Christianity.

And my concern is that oftentimes we treat the words of Paul much like we do iTunes software agreements. We go to the app store. Okay, maybe if you're an Android user, you go to the Android app store. We look for a free app. I don't have to pay for it. Look at all the implications. Look at all the things it can enable me to do. I don't have to pay for it. I download it. And before we do, there's this long thing. It's just a thing now. It's just blah, blah, blah—it's just words, right? And what do we all do? Scroll. Agree. Yet we scarcely understand what it is we just agreed to.

This happened to me recently. I downloaded an app. It was a really cool emoji app, way beyond the basic emojis. This was like, it was custom. You could custom design your face and custom design—cool, right? So I quickly went to the app store. Free. So I downloaded it, put in my password, all good. User agreement? Agree. And then I designed it. It was really cool. And then I went to hit send, and this little window popped up. And it said, hey, guess what? To use all of this means I get to look at every one of your texts if I so choose. And we can share that with all of our product designers. Huh? Delete, delete, delete,

delete. You know? I immediately went to my phone, I removed it, but it was a good wakeup. It was like, it was really cool until I realized, like, wait a second. What?

And so that's precisely the issue. Right? We all want to sign up for the cross, but do we understand the implications of the resurrection? Do we understand what it means to actually invite Jesus inside the house? To agree to the fact that Jesus and his Holy Spirit has come in? And to use the great image of C.S. Lewis when he says when we invite Jesus in—and this is complete paraphrase—that we want Jesus to simply change the paint, maybe the carpet, maybe some new cabinets—but we're not ready for him to level the house and start all over again. But that's the implications of the resurrection. And so Paul uses two ways of understanding the implications of this union. First, it is this—it is the old self, verse six, and then the body of sin.

The old self. Paul says, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." This idea of the old self being crucified—what is this old self? This old self, that which Jesus took upon himself, is our old identity, our old self, our old egos, our own old self-understanding in terms of our relationship with who we are with God and who we were apart from God. What has been crucified is the way in which we used to live, the way in which we understood ourselves, the way we lead our lives. That is now done. It is finished. We've been given a new name. We've been made children through adoption as his children, made sons and daughters of the King—not just to receive the inheritance, but to be given new names. That old self, Paul says, was crucified with him.

What does this mean, then? It means we no longer live in the way we used to. It means that we no longer tolerate the old sinful patterns. It means that we no longer seek to progress in those old, sinful patterns. You see, so oftentimes this old self being crucified means this—oftentimes people believe this means that we no longer want to sin. No, we still want to sin. Some people believe it means we're no longer guilty of sin. No, we can still be guilty of sin, even though our old selves have been crucified with Christ. Others believe that having the old self crucified with Christ means that we ought not to sin. You better not. That's not what's being said here either. It's often believed here, too, that I'm just slowly moving away from those old, sinful patterns. That's not what's meant here either. Another way that it's often understood is if I can just take my own stand and I'm going to renounce sin, that the old self being crucified—I'm just going to do it. That's not what it means either.

Paul is very clear here. He says, "For we know that our old self was crucified." Past tense. Once and done. Over. However, it doesn't mean we no longer want to sin. It doesn't mean we no longer are tempted to sin. It doesn't mean that we no longer are guilty and in need of repentance and forgiveness. All of those things are still present, and no amount of renouncing is going to rid us of that—because that would just be man-centered, and we wouldn't need Jesus. But what he says here is not only was the old self crucified—he says this, "so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

So the body of sin that is done away with—he's not talking about that the physical body is bad. What he's saying is that sin is expressed through our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our desires, our actual physical body—sin expresses itself that way. And oftentimes we can fall prey to its temptations and its dictates. But the old self has been crucified. We have now been made new. But we still have the presence of sin. The old self was done away with so that the body of sin might be dealt with. The body of sin is still here. The temptations are still here. The old dictates can sometimes still creep up on us. Our desires overwhelm us. When we don't get what we want, we get angry and we try to pursue them. We do whatever we can. It's still present.

And when Paul says that the implications of union is that the old self is crucified but the body of sin is still here but being done away with, what does this mean, then, that we are freed from sin? What does it mean? One image is this. We think about the country of Afghanistan for a moment. When our

military moved in to remove the ruling, reigning government, the Taliban, to move them out of power, and now a new government has been put in its place—they are no longer being lead or reigned over by the Taliban. They have a new government, a new leader. But what has the Taliban done? The Taliban has simply become a guerilla warfare unit. They're still present in the country. They're still causing all kinds of problems.

The same is the case with the Christian, that those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have received a new, reigning King—the Lord Jesus Christ. The price for sin is finished. Forgiveness is there. We have a new ruler. And yet, there's still guerilla warfare going on. They're still present—the old desires, the old dictates, the old patterns. But if the old self has been crucified, then we are no longer under sin's reigning power. It's no longer over us. We're under grace. Sin is no longer your king. Your desires that wage war and led you astray—it's no longer the one who calls the shots. And if we believe that somehow sin has been dethrone, and its power, which is death, has been removed, and yet return it to the throne room, we have misunderstood what has happened in justification and new life, in the cross and the resurrection. It's still waging war, but it's not the king. We're under a new King, the King of glory, the King of grace.

And he says, “we are no longer slaves to sin.” And he says in verse eight, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.” If you are a professing Christian trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, that means death is no longer your master. We have been freed from it. The law simply points us to Christ. We know we are guilty, but it leads us to Christ. But then we can say, how then do we live? Through the glorious resurrection of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am no longer a slave to sin, but I belong to him.

Now, what does that mean? “In the same way,” he says in verse eleven, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” I tried to work through this and understand, then, what is it am I to do, are you to do, to move beyond just understanding Jesus' work as an insurance policy, but having a car that doesn't run? How do we have justification and sanctification? If it's all grace, and I have a new King, and the presence of sin is still around, and I still feel its temptations, how do I keep myself from giving myself over to it again? How do I keep from tolerating it, growing it, nursing it?

And I'm grateful for Dallas Willard. Great writer, who wrote a book about his growing up in rural Missouri. I want you to hear this story, and then I want to tie it together. Dallas Willard writes this. He says:

As a child I lived in an area of southern Missouri where electricity was available only in the form of lightning. But in my senior year of high school the REA (Rural Electrification Administration) extended its lines into the area where we lived, and electrical power became available to households and farms. When those lines came by our farm, a very different way of living presented itself. Our relationships to fundamental aspects of life—daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it—could then be vastly changed for the better. But we still had to believe in the electricity and its arrangements, understand them, and take the practical steps involved in relying on it.

You may think the comparison rather crude, and in some respects it is. But it will help us to understand Jesus' basic message about the kingdom of heaven if we pause to reflect on those farmers who, in effect, heard the message: “Repent, for electricity is at hand. Turn from your kerosene lamps and lanterns, your iceboxes and cellars, your scrub-boards and rug beaters, your woman-powered sewing machines and your radio with dry-cell batteries.” The power that could make their lives far better was right there near them

where, by making relatively simple arrangements, they could utilize it. Strangely, a number did not accept it.

A number did not want to tap into it. And they simply wanted to not be changed, and live as if electricity never existed. There's an amazing passage in the New Testament—there are many. This is one: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness"—old self, the reigning of sin—"and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" [Colossians 1:14]. And then in Titus, Paul writes:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. [Titus 2:11-14]

What that is telling us is that Jesus means to take us from the domain of darkness through the work of the cross and bring us into the kingdom of his marvelous Son through the gloriousness of the resurrection.

How, then, do we live? Are you ready for it? It's really remarkable, really cutting-edge. Here you go. We as a church believe that the Scriptures have told us there are three ways—three ways—that we tap into the grace, the power, the light of the living God to grow in Christ, to become increasingly those who reflect the glory of the resurrected Jesus. Even though sin still remains, it still will tempt us, it still will dictate, but we can claim you are no longer my master.

How do we remain in that? Three ways. Are you ready? The Word of God, prayer, and the sacraments. It's not retreats, though those are great. It's not a list of enumerable sermons, though those can be really good, too. You can put plenty of books on your shelves. There are a legion. But there are three means by which God and his Holy Spirit feed the people of God to enable them to grow in grace, to remember that their old selves have been crucified by the blood of Jesus Christ and have been raised to new life—to walk in it. Three ways.

The Spirit walking us through this Word. Christian, are you walking in the Word? Are you listening to it? I've used it before. Let me encourage you again. If you are not reading the Word, do not be surprised by the strange coldness that seeps into your heart between you and the Lord, because he has already spoken to you. And I'm not talking slavishly about a quiet time. I'm saying, just start with reading a psalm a day. Just begin reading it, praying. And here's a prayer—Lord, have mercy on me, for the dictates of my old self come in and lead me away from what you have spoken. But I want to hear you speak to my soul again. Lord, speak, for your servant is listening. Prayer. It's just talking to God as I am talking to you. Just talk to him, and the Spirit will pray even when you don't know how to pray. And the third is the sacraments. We come tonight. We have the Lord's Supper tonight. Maybe you're busy on Sunday night, but come. We celebrate the Lord's Supper tonight, and then the third Sunday of the month. Do you know that the Holy Spirit working in you takes the Word of God and takes the elements of the Lord's Supper, and he feeds you grace? Not grace just for forgiveness, but grace for new life.

Friends, union and new life is more than insurance on a car that can't run. It is salvation that leads to new life. It is yours. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, come. Feed your people by the means that you have given—Your Word, prayer, and the sacraments. Lord, we confess that we want, oftentimes, just half of Jesus. We want the half that we get forgiveness, but not the half that comes in to remake our whole lives, that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. But Lord, we have been buried with him in baptism and to his death, and we have been raised with him in his resurrection, and that union means new life. Lord, I pray for any who can hear my voice who call upon you but whose lives are impoverished because they have forgotten this or they have

rejected it. Lord, draw them. Draw them to see the gloriousness of your grace, that means to make us new. Help us, we pray. We need you. In Jesus' name. Amen.