

Romans: United to Christ

Romans 6:1-7

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 6. We've been working our way through this great book, and in God's good providence we come to a wonderful passage, which stresses the resurrection of our Savior and its implications for us. We remind you that in Romans, chapter 5, verse 20, if you want to sneak a peek back at those verses at the end of that chapter, the apostle had said something absolutely stunning, shocking to the Jewish Christian and Jewish audience around him, when he had suggested that the law came in order that sin might increase. And he said something even more shocking when he said where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. And that particular assertion caused some confusion on the part of some of his hearers. Some of his hearers were opposed to his teaching no matter what. In this they saw as a classic example of where his teaching would lead. It would lead to moral anarchy, to antinomianism, to wild lascivious behavior, based upon the idea that if where sin increases, grace abounds all the more, then why not sin more so that we can have more grace? On the other hand, some heard him actually encouraging that kind of response to grace. And so this was a statement of tremendous importance which was responded to in two wrong, but different ways.

Now the apostle had already corrected that misunderstanding in Romans, chapter 5, verse 21, when he had explained that grace reigns in righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Grace reigns over sin. It reigns in the righteousness of Christ. It reigns by His mediation, and it reigns to eternal life. This new life which has been granted us in Jesus Christ. And if we had understood what He had said in Romans 5, chapter 21, we wouldn't make the mistake which someone made which Paul records for us in Romans, chapter 6, verse 1. But you do need to know that though Paul has pre-answered the questions of Romans, chapter 6, verse 1, he does spend the whole of Romans, chapter 6, giving an expanded answer to the very first question.

Now this question is not Paul's question about his teaching. This is someone else's question about his teaching. It shows both an objection to his teaching and a misunderstanding of it. With that as introduction, let's hear God's word here in

Romans, chapter 6, beginning in the very first verse.

What shall we say then. Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be. How shall we who died to sin, still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we, too, might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin: for he who has died, is freed from sin.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant word. May He write His eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Father, this is your word. We ask that those who believe on Jesus Christ, hear it today in their ears proclaimed that they would be built up in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. And that those who do not know Jesus savingly, those who do not trust in Him, as He is offered in the gospel for their salvation. As they hear this word, that You would open their hearts to hear and receive and respond. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Why is the resurrection so important? I'm sure that many of you have heard ministers and Sunday School teachers and Vacation Bible School teachers explain or give an answer to that question. And many of those answers may have been good and helpful. You may have heard a Sunday School teacher sometime or a minister say, "Well, Jesus had to be raised from the dead. It proved who He claimed to be. His resurrection was a witness that all He had claimed to be, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of the World, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world. His resurrection is a proof that all of that is true. And that's a good answer, that's a biblical answer, but that's not all the answer. Some of you might think, well He had to be raised again from the dead, or we wouldn't have known that this supreme offering for sin had been received and accepted by God the Father; and thus, we, too, were accepted as that offering was accepted. In other words, the resurrection is an evidence of His victory over sin, and an evidence the Father has accepted it as the due penalty for payment of sin; the evidence that we are then accepted in the Beloved. And, if you answered that way, you'd have given a good answer, and I would imagine that some of you even now have some answers on your mind that would be correct and biblical.

The thing that Paul emphasizes in this passage is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of both our justification and our sanctification. That is, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of our being accepted by God the

Father. It is the source of our being counted as not guilty by God the Father. It is the source of our being forgiven. But it is also the source of our transformation. Not only are we accepted as righteous, but also we are transformed increasingly into righteousness by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection for the believer is a fountain of new life, and the apostle makes that clear here. He makes it clear many places in his writings. He constantly points to the resurrection of Christ as the starting point of the application of the work of Christ in the believer's life, and so it's a glorious thing, this teaching of Paul's about the resurrection.

But in this passage, he uses that teaching about the resurrection to counter a terrible misunderstanding of his teaching, and an important, a serious, and a grave, objection to his teaching. You will remember in Romans, chapter 5, verse 20 he had suggested that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more. Grace outstripped it, went beyond even where sin had gone. And this gave rise to two particular responses to Paul's teaching. On the one hand, some people said, "Look Paul, there is your teaching about grace, your teaching that God saves us not based upon our works or our righteousness, but He saves us on the basis of His grace, and your teaching about justification. The idea that our works contribute nothing to being accepted by God, but that God justifies us freely as we simply trust on Jesus Christ, if we simply believe on Him. They said, "Paul if you teach that, people will live immoral lives." So what you're saying is I can be accepted by God apart from my personal righteousness. It's not my personal righteousness that makes me accepted by God; and, therefore, there's no place for personal righteousness and godliness in a believer's life. And they objected to this and said, "Paul, you see, your kind of teaching will lead people to live in immoral and godless ways. It will lead the people to dishonor the law of God and not to strive after godliness and holiness." They were saying, "Paul, your teaching will lead people down the wrong road."

Pause there for a moment and say, "Isn't it interesting that that is an objection to Paul's teaching." Even though there are churches today that teach that salvation is not by grace alone, it's by grace, plus our works, and justification is not by faith alone, it's not by faith alone, it's by faith, plus works. Now I want you to know that people who teach that can't get the same objection that Paul gets here. You see if you're teaching Paul's doctrine of justification, people have to be able to say, "Well, gee, you've left our works out of justification." The answer is, "Right." If a church teaches that our works are in justification, it's not teaching what Paul is teaching here. If Paul were teaching that justification was by faith plus works, nobody could have said to him, "Well, shouldn't we continue to sin so that grace might increase?" If he were teaching justification by faith, plus works, it would make perfect sense where works fit in the scheme of salvation. But it is precisely because he is not teaching justification by faith, plus works, that he gets this objection. So some people object, and they say, "Paul, your teaching is going to lead to moral anarchy. People are going to say, 'Oh, we're saved and it doesn't matter how we live, because our works don't save us. God's grace saves us and

our words have nothing to do with justification." That's one response to Paul's teaching.

The other response is this. "Oh boy, this is great. I see what you're saying, Paul. You're saying that we ought to go ahead and sin so that grace can abound all the more." You see, there were some libertines out there lurking around, not just the legalists who were accusing Paul of downplaying the law, and downplaying the necessity of holiness. But there are some Libertines out there. People who just sort of want to be saved and live however they wanted. And they were saying, "Oh, I see what you're saying, Paul, you're saying that we're right. You are saved by grace, and therefore you can live however you want because, after all, if grace abounds where sin abounds, then grace even more abounds where sin abounds. And Romans, chapter 6 is Paul's response to both those misinterpretations of what he had said in Romans 5, chapter 20.

And so he begins Romans, chapter 6 by stating the misunderstanding of him that many people were spreading. Notice the first question, are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? The rest of the chapter is an answer to that question. But today, I want you to see why the resurrection is so important. In three particular aspects as we work through this passage together. As Paul responds to that question, shouldn't we sin so that grace could abound? He gives three answers to it in verses 1 through 7.

In verses 1 and 2 he says, "No, we're not to go on sinning so that grace might increase because of who you are. In verses 3 and 4 he says, "No, we're not to go on sinning so that grace might increase, because I want you to think about what your baptism means." And thirdly, in verses 5 through 7 he says, "No, we're not to go on sinning so that grace might abound because of the decisive change brought about in our lives by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I'd like to look at those with you for a few moments today. Let's begin in verse 1 and 2.

I. Continuing in sin, living in sin, is a contradiction of grace and its purposes.

Verses 1 and 2 you kind of get a point counterpoint. Shouldn't we go on sinning so that grace might abound? Question. Notice how Paul answers the question in verse 2. He answers the question with a question. It's kind of like, "Au, contraire." You think about this question first. How can people who have died to sin, still live in it? In other words, Paul first wants to counter the idea that we should sin in order that grace would abound by considering who we are. Paul says, "Think about it for a minute. Think about who you are. If you will think about who you are in Jesus Christ, you will answer the question. And you will answer it in an emphatic negative. Of course, we shouldn't go on sinning that grace might abound because of who I am in Christ." Well, I don't see why. Oh yes, you do, it's right there in verse 2. Notice what he says, "How shall we who died to sin

continue to live in it?" He's giving you a definition. It's not the total definition of what a Christian is. But he's saying, "This is what a Christian is. A Christian is a person who has died to sin. And so Paul is telling us that continuing in sin, living in sin is a contradiction of who we are. It's a contradiction of God's grace. It's a contradiction of the purposes of God's grace.

In His question, you see, there are two components. First of all, he tells us that Christians are those who died to sin. How shall we who died to sin, still live in it? And secondly, he makes it clear that it is an utter contradiction to go on sinning, to live a life of sin, having died to it. In other words Paul is appealing to the identity of the believer. He's appealing to who you are, and he's saying, "Consider yourself as one who has died to sin. That's what you are in Jesus Christ. Now how could you possibly suggest that you go on sinning in order to receive more grace, when who you are is a person who has died to sin."

Now, let's pause very quickly there and say that Paul is not pushing the power of positive thinking here. He's not saying, "If you'll just think hard enough that you're a person who has died to sin, well then, you'll eventually you'll die to sin." Paul is talking about a reality which has been wrought by God, and he's talking about you realizing that reality is not thinking it into existence. Paul is not also at the same time, encouraging denial. He's not encouraging people who are whole-hog in love with the life of sin to just pretend like they're not. He's not saying, "Okay, you people that are in love with sin, just for a moment, pretend like you're not and pretend like you've died to sin." He's not encouraging denial. He is talking about what happens when a person is united to Christ. Paul in this whole passage is talking about union with Christ. The reason the believer has died to sin is because he is united to Christ. In union with Christ, the believer dies to the penalty and the power of sin. Paul has been talking primarily about how the penalty of sin is broken to the believer up to this point. In Romans, chapter 6, it will be his concern to show you how the power of sin is broken to the believer through union with Christ. And so to the first answer to the question "Shouldn't we go on sinning so that grace might abound?" Paul says, "Well just think of who you are? You are a person united to Christ, and therefore, you died to sin." Question answered. But he's not done with you yet. He wants to carry on and give yet another answer to that. Just to lay that particular misunderstanding to rest.

II. Remember your baptism (into Christ and His death) and improve it!

Look at verses 3 and 4. Not only does he point to who you are, he points you to your baptism. He asks you to stop and reflect. What does my baptism mean? He's reminding us of the significance of our baptism. What it symbolizes. And he basically says in verses 3 and 4, "Remember your baptism into Christ and into death, and improve it." Now, you know that word comes from our *Catechism*, and it says that if we attend the application of the sacrament of baptism of others, that

we ought to improve our own baptism. That doesn't mean that we should trade it in for a new and improved model. It simply means that we should look as it is administered to others and we should remember the grace of God held out to us in our baptism. We should understand it more. We should thank God and appreciate it more. And we should grow in the graces which flow from it. And so Paul is saying, "I want you to reflect about your baptism, and I want you to reflect about two particular things.

First that you were baptized into Christ, and second that you were baptized into His death." And he focuses on that in verses 3 and 4. And he begins that focus by asking another question. And here's his question: "Don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ, have been baptized into His death?" So he turns us the subject of baptism. Now let me pause and tell you why he's done this. Remember he's just said, "If you're a believer, you died to sin." This very much unnerved his opposition. And they start scratching their heads, and they're thinking, "Well, when exactly was it that we died to sin?" And Paul immediately says, "Consider your baptism." Now Paul doesn't say that because water baptism saves you. Paul doesn't say that water baptism, whenever it was administered, to whomever it was administered, however it was administered, by emersion, effusion, or sprinkling, to infants or adults - that's not the point here. He is not saying that water baptism saves you. Nor is he saying that water baptism is the instrument that unites you to Christ. What he is saying is that water baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ. That's one thing that baptism symbolizes. That's one thing that baptism signifies. And so in responding to that question, "When did we die to sin," Paul is pointing to union with Christ. And then he is pointing you to the sacrament which illustrates union with Christ, which is baptism. And he says, "Don't you know that everyone who has been baptized, is baptized into Christ, into His person, and into His death, into His work.

Now think about that for a few moments. When he says, think about it, you were baptized into Christ. No longer is sin master over you, Christ is master over you. No longer is sin your lord. Christ is your Lord. That's symbolized in your baptism. You are not under the dominion of sin, you're not under the condemnation of the law, you are now living in the free grace reign of the dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even your baptism shows that you shouldn't go on sinning so that grace might increase, because you're not of the dominion of sin. You're under the dominion of your Lord. You are baptized into Christ, into His person, you are bound with Him. You're in covenant with Him, you're united with Him. You're a beneficiary of His work. And you're baptized into His death. Christ's person and work can never be separated. And so if you were baptized into Christ, then you were also a beneficiary of His work, and one of His great works was His death. And His death was to break the power of sin. Not only as penalty, but as power. Paul will later in this chapter, in verse 5, and then again in verse 11 tell us that Christ died to sin, and he's telling us that Christ has broken the power of sin. Sin's power is broken in our lives because we are united in His death.

And Paul emphasizes how radically the break of the dominion of sin is by his using three words. Crucified, died and buried. You couldn't find three words that better stress a discontinuity between the old life and the new life. If you have been crucified, you are good and dead. If you have died, you are good and dead. If you have been buried, you are good and dead. You've heard the joke where the guy says, "Death is nature's way of telling you to slow down." Well, death brings an emphatic end with the life that has gone before it. The apostle is saying, "Look, if you've been baptized, and that baptism accurately reflects the reality that the Holy Spirit has brought in your heart, or will bring about in your heart, then that baptism itself testifies to your death to sin. Your death to the dominion of sin. And the power of sin.

And furthermore, on the positive side, it points to this ability that we might walk in the newness of life. Look at verse 4. "Our death to sin was so that we might walk in newness of life. And this newness of life, this break with sin is not something temporary, but it's permanent because Christ was raised never to die again, and so we are dead to sin and alive to God. So he's pointing to the resurrection there. So the first thing that Paul does in response to the question, "Well shouldn't we go on sinning," is remember who you are. And then the second thing that he does is he says, "Think about your baptism. Your baptism symbolized what union with Christ actually brings about." It brings about death to sin, and the breaking of the dominion of sin.

Think of this picture. There's a very talented young woman, she's graduated from medical school, she's married, she has children, she's a practicing physician. She is tops in her field. She's a member of a local Christian congregation. She has a serious accident, and she has to go on pain medication during the course of her recovery from that accident. She becomes addicted to pain medication. She begins to steal pain medication from the hospital where she works, and the clinic where she works. She then begins to engage in other types of illegal activities. This comes to the knowledge of not only her colleagues, but also the legal authorities and suddenly, as her marriage is falling apart, and her parenting is falling apart, she is actually facing judicial problems. She's called before the court, but a merciful judge says to her, "There are mitigating circumstances here. Therefore, I'm going to let you off the hook. I'm not going to put you in jail. I can't speak for the medical association. I don't know whether they'll pull your license. I can't help you with your marriage and with your family; but what I want you to do is, I want you to go into treatment, and I want you to deal with this drug."

Notice what the judge is doing. He is being very kind. He is saying, "I'm going to spare you the legal challenges here. You are not going to face the penalties for the laws you have broken, but you are going to have to go out and as best you can, through therapy, and help yourself to deal with these personal problems that you have." That's all the judge can do. He's being kind. That's all he can do. He's being kind. He can't change her life. He can't fix her up. He can't repair the

breach in her marriage. He can't repair the problems in her career. But he can try and help. He spares her the punishment that is due for her crime.

Now that is not what God is doing when we're saved. And that is what Paul is talking about when he talks about resurrection power. He's saying, "Look, when God forgives you, He doesn't call you in court and say, 'Look there's some mitigating circumstances, and I'm going to let you off the hook, but the rest you're going to have to do on your own.'" That's not the picture at all. First all, you're pulled into court and God says, "Okay, I've read the case. There are no mitigating circumstances. You deserve to fry. But because of My Son, the perfection of His life, His death on your behalf, and His resurrection, I am going to spare you. I am going to forgive you. The slate is clean. Now, I'm not going to send you out to do it on your own, because you can't. What you need is new life. You're dead in sin, I'm going to put a principle of new life in you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That new life in you will bring about a total life transformation."

III. The transformation of grace is decisive.

You see that what God is doing is totally different. And how does He do it? Through resurrection power. Look at verses 5 through 7. He focuses on this. Paul is emphatic. The transformation of grace is decisive. He can even talk about the death of our old self, the death of our old man, freedom from the dominion of sin. Paul points us to who we are. Paul points us to our baptism, and what it signifies. That's why we shouldn't go on sinning.

But ultimately Paul points us to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the emphatic change of life that comes about in us, for us, because of Christ's resurrection. Look at verse 5: "If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also in the likeness of His resurrection." Paul is emphasizing the hope that is held out in union with Christ, because we not only die to sin, but because we are united to Him, we are raised with Him.

Now what resurrection is Paul talking about? He is not merely talking about the resurrection to come. He is talking about the first resurrection. He is talking about the resurrection that is granted to us now. Did you realize that believers experience the first resurrection before they experience the first death? Believers are raised to newness of life with Christ when we first believe on Him. We are granted a foretaste of resurrection, glory and power to come in our present experience, so that we are no longer under the domination of sin. And Paul is saying here that if you have died to Him, you've been buried to Him, then surely you'll be raised in His likeness. And this doesn't just mean some day in the future. He means now. Believers experience the first resurrection. You're going to hear about that when Derek gets to Revelation, chapter 20 on Wednesday night. And you've always wondered in Revelation 20, what in the world is John talking about when he talks about the first resurrection and second resurrection, and you

think that all gets into millennial views. Well, this is the first resurrection. Read John 3, read Romans 6, read I Thessalonians 5, and then you look at Revelation 20, you'll have no problem with the first resurrection. You'll have it sorted out. This is the first resurrection. And Paul is saying, when you believe on Jesus Christ, God grants you new life that flows from the resurrection of Christ. It's yours because you're united to Him. Does it mean you never sin? Well, you obviously haven't read Romans 7. Does it mean you never have a desire to sin? Well, you obviously haven't read Romans 7. Does it mean that you are no longer under the dominion of sin? Absolutely. You have new life granted you in Jesus Christ. Leslie put it this way, "Made like Him, like Him we rise." I think he's probably thinking of the second resurrection. I think he's thinking of the final resurrection when Jesus comes to bring His people home, and we're raised from the dead. But you see, it's just as true of this first resurrection. This new life. Made like Him, like Him we rise. Every believer has two resurrections before Him. The resurrection of newness of life, and then the resurrection to come when the body is united with the Spirit and with Christ forever. God made the Son of His love to be the object of His love, to be the object of His wrath in order that we who were the objects of His wrath, might be made the Sons of His love.

That's true, but there's more. It is not merely that God made the Son of His love, the object of His wrath, that we who were the objects of His wrath might become the Sons of His love, but also that we would be made to be like the Son of His love. You know, when you look at the gospel, there are many interesting reactions to Jesus. There is that interesting reaction from the Centurion at the foot of the cross, and the disciples are all peeling away, and the crowds are dissipating, and the earthquake comes, and the rocks are falling around him, and the Centurion is standing there, and he says, "Surely this Man was the Son of God." There's that great reaction from Thomas who is standing before Jesus with Jesus displaying the marks in His flesh, and saying, "Thomas, if you don't believe Me, just put your finger right in there." You know, it's interesting. John never tells us whether Thomas took him up on His offer or not. But Thomas, whatever he did, he finally falls down before his Lord, and he says, "My Lord and my God. It's amazing these reactions that you hear." Nobody ever says, "What a great moral teacher." What practical advice Jesus gave. They are always stunned by this man, and who He is.

And I wonder if someone ever reacted to Him this way, by saying, "What kind of a Father must He have?" You know, to see the glory of His Person, and they say, "What kind of a Father has a Son like this in His glory?" You see, the Heavenly Father wants people to ask the same question when they see you. He wants them to say, "What kind of a Father does she have?" "What kind of a Father does he have?" Because the resurrection life of Christ in us, remakes us into His likeness. That's what Paul says here in Romans 6:5. And if we are made into His likeness, then what is that likeness? It is the very image and exact representation of His Heavenly Father. John 1, Colossians 1. He makes us to be like Him. He morally conforms us to His Image. And the apostle is saying, "That by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by our union with Him, we are broken free from the power from the domination of sin."

The reason that I told you that story before, and used the example of addiction is because we believe that those who are addicted are under the domination of the habit. But friends, we don't believe that we are under the dominion of sin if we're apart from Jesus Christ. We believe that we are perfectly free to do as we please. And my friends, Paul is making it clear in this passage that if you are apart from Christ, you are under sin and you are a willing slave to it; and you are just as much dominated by it as any addict, as any junkie. And you are in just as desperate a shape. And so it makes no sense to say to you, "Do better." It makes no sense to say to you, "Look deep within, and find something to pull yourself out of this mess." No, you need new life from the outside implanted inside, and the apostle Paul in verses 5 through 7, says, "That new life comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ." God does not save you and forgive you in order to get you back ground zero neutral, and then you kind of take it from there. God saves you, He forgives you, and He grants you new life so that you might walk in that new life. Justification and liberation go hand in hand.

The Father wants us to look like His Son. We're not only forgiven by the Son, we're transformed by the Son. And if you have not experienced that forgiving and loving transforming power this morning, then I have good news for you. There is but one thing that you must do. That is to renounce yourself, repent of your sin, bow the knee, trust in Him. It's all one complex. Your turning from yourself and you're turning to Him. You're recognizing that you're the mess, you're the problem, you have no solutions to bring to this situation. You must only hold out the empty hand of faith, and beg for mercy. And I can promise you this, if that hand is extended, the Father always responds in mercy. May God grant mercy to you this day. Let us pray.

Lord God, the resurrection is glorious; and the new life that comes with it is glorious. And we ask, O God, that all who hear, would respond to that word in faith, in Jesus' name, we ask it, Amen.

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