

Identification

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The third key concept for understanding union with Christ is this idea of *identification*. And what that means is that we are no longer identified as belonging to Adam and the realm of Adam, which includes the realm of sin and death, but now we are in Christ and under the rule of Christ, and therefore, we belong to this realm of life and peace and righteousness.

So to illustrate this concept, we're going to turn to Romans chapter 6. In Romans chapter 6, Paul addresses a very important question that is raised by Romans 1–5. Now, Romans 1–5, what Paul has argued is that the whole world is guilty before God and stands condemned, both Jews and Gentiles. The whole world stands subject to God's judgment. But because of God's mercy, He sent His son, Jesus Christ, into the world who died as an atoning sacrifice that our sins might be paid for. And therefore, by faith in Christ, we are made right with God.

Now, this raises the key question that everyone wants to ask. Well, if I'm made right with God by believing in Jesus, can I then just go on sinning? And Paul answers that question. He anticipates that question and then provides an answer for it. So in Romans chapter 6, verse 1, he says, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" And the short answer is "By no means!" (v. 2). No way. No, that's the wrong answer. Then the rest of the chapter, chapter 6, he gives the longer answer. And he begins by saying, "We . . . died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? What does Paul mean by that? Well, I think when Paul refers to sin in this chapter, he's not just referring to individual mistakes or individual shortcomings and sins and failures that we all execute every day of our lives. He's talking about sin as a power, sin as a kind of domain, sin as an authority. And he's saying that once you believe in Jesus, once you become a Christian, you have died to this realm of sin, this domain, this dominion, this kingdom of sin. How can we live in it any longer? In other words, you've been

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taken out of one realm and put into another realm, so you no longer can live in this realm over here, this realm of sin.

And then he goes on to explain how all this works. So in verse 3, he says, “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” (vv. 3–4). Now, there’s a lot going on there in those verses, but what he’s saying is that when Christ died, we died spiritually with Him. This is connected to the previous concept, the concept of *participation*. In Ephesians 2, we talked about being made alive with Christ, being raised with Christ. But here, we’re talking about dying with Christ, being buried with Christ. When Christ died, He took our spiritual selves with Him to death so that when we connect to Him by faith, our old self is put to death with Him. And that is precisely what moves us out of this realm represented by Adam, represented by sin and death, out of that realm and into a new realm.

See, when you are born into the realm of Adam, as we all are, it’s a little bit like the Mafia. When you’re in the Mafia, there’s no way out of the Mafia, except one way. You know what that is? It’s to die. That’s the only way out of the Mafia. And it’s like that when you’re born into the realm of sin and death represented by Adam. There’s only one way out, and that is to die. So if we die with Christ, then we escape that realm, and then we are made alive in Christ’s new realm. We are brought to life. We are resurrected. We’re given new birth into this new realm.

So our participation with Christ effects our transfer of identification. We’re no longer identified with this first realm; we now are identified in this second realm, in the realm of Christ. And it’s by participating in Christ’s death that gets us out of one realm, and it’s by participating in His resurrection that gets us into the new realm. So we can see that union with Christ is absolutely essential for everything that Paul has been saying here at the beginning of Romans chapter 6.

Now, He goes on in verse 5 to say, “If we have been united with him [like this in his death], we will certainly also be united with him in [his] resurrection” So again, if you share in Christ’s death, you will share in His resurrection. If you participate in His death, you participate in His resurrection. “For we know that our old self,” verse 6, “was crucified with him so that the body [of] sin

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

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might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been [freed] from sin” (vv. 6–7). That’s exactly what I was getting at a few moments ago, that if you have died, you have escaped this realm of sin. It is no longer your master. You are no longer enslaved to its authority.

He goes on in verse 8, “Now if we [have] died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” Again, that idea if you die with Him, you 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” (vv. 8–11). So what Paul has been saying so far is that if you’re a Christian, if you have faith in Christ, then your wagon has been hitched to His wagon. So when He dies, when He’s put to death, you die with Him and so escape the realm of sin and death. And when He is raised to life, you are raised to life with Him and so you are reborn into this new realm, this realm of Christ.

The key point in verse 11 is “count yourselves dead to sin.” In other words, this is already true about you, but you may not realize it. And I think that’s true for so many of us. So many of us who have put our trust in Jesus and become Christians, we don’t realize that our union with Christ has changed our allegiance. It’s changed our location. It’s changed our identity. Our allegiance is no longer with this realm of Adam, this realm of sin and death. Our location is not there. Okay? We have a new allegiance to this new realm, this realm of Christ, and our allegiance is there. But while that may be true, it doesn’t mean that we realize it. So Paul is saying in verse 11, count yourselves this way. Understand yourselves this way. Accept the fact that this is true about you, that you are actually dead to the realm of sin, and you are alive to God in Christ Jesus through our union with Christ. You are now alive with God.

“Therefore,” he says in verse 12, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer [the parts of your body] to sin as . . . instrument[s] of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer [the parts of your body] to him as . . . instrument[s] of righteousness. For sin shall [not] be your master, because you are not under . . . law, but under grace” (vv. 12–14). And here, we see that Paul finally answers the question that was raised in chapter 6, verse 1: “Shall we go on sinning?” The answer,

the short answer, remember, was no. “By no means!” (v. 2). No way. The longer answer is this: You have been taken out of the realm of sin and death. You no longer belong to that realm. You are no longer under its authority because you’ve died with Christ, and you’ve been raised with Christ into a new realm. You are now alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is fact if you believe in Jesus.

So don’t treat your body, don’t treat your abilities, your resources, don’t treat your mind and your talents as though you’re still serving the master of sin. Sin is no longer your master. You are no longer under its authority. You are now under the authority of Christ. So use your resources—your body, your mind, your abilities, your talents—to serve righteousness, to serve Christ. Because now you serve Him, you are under His lordship. Use everything you’ve got to play for your team. Don’t score what they call in soccer an “own goal” where you accidentally kick goals for your opposing team. We don’t play for that team anymore. We play for this team. So use your body in a way that brings honor to Christ.