

How to Live with a New Identity

a sermon in the series
Saved by His Life: Union with Christ

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by S. Michael Durham
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Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Last week we saw from this text that we *have* died and *have* been crucified with Christ. It's in the past tense. It's already happened to those who have believed. Therefore, because of our union with Christ in His mediatorial and redemptive role, whatever has happened to Him for us is true about us. We've died with Him, we've been buried with Him and we've been resurrected with Him.

We're still examining our union to His death. Paul said that Jesus died for more than just your forgiveness, but that He died to sin. Jesus had some kind of relationship with sin, yet without sin. He didn't sin. But that doesn't mean He didn't have a relationship to it. What was that relationship? He came into a world that was ruled and dominated by it. He lived in the world, He associated with sinners and therefore He had relationship with lost humanity. In that way, there is this identification with sin yet without sin Himself. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

Paul is saying in verse 10 that when Jesus died on the cross, He not only died for our sins but He died to them. The moment He died, His relationship to sin was severed, done with. When He rose from the dead, He rose with a new identity. He was no longer identified with Adam's lost humanity. He is now the head and progenitor of a new race of humans—those called *the redeemed*. We have this new identity with Him. We're not what we once were, although we often feel and sometimes act that way. The truth of Romans 6 is that whoever you were before you put your faith in Christ is dead and buried and when you rose with Christ you didn't remain the same person. You have a new identity. You are no longer in Adam, but in Christ.

However, our union with Christ often seems unreal to us. Why is that? That's what I want to deal with today.

I. WHY UNION WITH CHRIST SEEMS UNREAL

Why does this death to sin still feel unreal, like some Bible study or theological proposition?

A. There is Still a Civil War Within.

We still feel sin in us.

Some of us have tried very hard to get rid of this sinful life, but we have found it most tenacious. It grabs on and won't turn loose. What is the way out? We think the answer is to pray and ask God to change us. "Lord, take out this anger in my heart." "Lord, take the pride out of me." "Lord, help me to think with a pure mind." "Get this covetous heart out of me!"

But what happens? Nothing! God never intended to make you strong so that you could overcome your temper. He never intended that *you* should overcome your temper. God wants you to see that you and I by nature are mean, ugly, unkind, unpleasant and worthless. I know that's not a feel-good message. I'm sorry I can't smile from ear to ear and tell you a story to make you feel good about yourself. But this is the truth of what God's up to. He wants you to know that in and of yourself you cannot weaken your temper, you cannot lessen your pride, you cannot remove the lust that you are. It's not what you do, it's who you are. "But you said last week I'm a new person and I have a new identity." Yes, but God wants you to know that your nature is still human and it's still fallen. He wants you to despise the fallenness we call human nature so that you will absolutely trust Him in all things.

Paul said it himself, "Within me is no good thing." In my fallen human nature, my humanity, there is no good thing. I've been given a new heart with the laws of God written on them, but in the person of Michael Durham there is not strength to overcome any sin. God wants us to know that so He lets us continue in this way, overcome by our sin.

One of the greatest misconceptions in Christianity is that if I can't overcome my sin I'm missing power and lacking something I need. Our way to overcome our sin is to try and try again to gain

strength over it. We think that if we were stronger and had more spiritual power we would have victory we could overcome and do more for God. It would seem reasonable to assume that failure to lead a holy life is due to our powerlessness so the obvious answer is to get more power. We need something we don't have. But this assumption leads to a wrong conclusion. If we see and feel our inability to confront and overcome our sin, then we naturally conclude that to gain victory over sin we must have more power. We say, "Lord, if only I were stronger I could control my outbursts of temper." Then we say to God, "I need something from You so I can do this or that," and so we plead with the Lord to strengthen us so we can exercise more self-control.

But this is absolutely wrong; that is not Christianity. God's way of delivering you from sin is not by making you stronger, but by making you see you will never be strong. God's method is to make us embrace our weakness. God sets you free from the power of sin, not by strengthening you but by making you so weak that you must let His strength reign. To do it our way leaves us in control.

B. What God Has Done.

He has left us with our fallen and corrupt natures, but He has through Christ Jesus delivered us from sin ruling and controlling us through our corrupt and less than perfect natures. He had us crucified with Christ and we have died to sin's dominion over us. As Romans 6:7 says, "For he who has died has been freed from sin." But the truth is sin still resides in us. How then can I actualize the death of Christ in my death to sin and still have deliverance?

II. The Actualization of Our Death With Christ

A. What Is Actualizing Our Death With Christ?

The word *actualization* means to make actual or real. In other words, it means to turn into action or fact. Now surely we should protest this word *actualize* because our death with Christ is already a fact, it is already a reality that actually happened. We cannot make it anymore real or actual than it already is. If it's true, then it's true. Something cannot become anymore true than it is. Ah, this is right, but something may be true and real, but not true and real to you. One man may deny the existence of God, but does their unbelief make God go away? Not at all. It's true there is a Creator God and He made all men. Unbelief cannot make that unreal, but that truth is not real in his life, it's not actualized to him. The same is true for believers. You can know something to be true and believe it with your mind as truth but it not be real in your life.

This is what we need today. We need our death with Christ to become an actual reality.

B. How to Actualize Our Union In Jesus' Death.

Paul gives us four things we are to do. Here is another great deception for believers. There is a terrible misconception—mainly for those of the reformed persuasion or those who are more Christ-centered in their Gospel, who truly believe in the sovereignty of God—that is leading to

our continual defeat. There is a tendency to believe that because God and His grace are so sovereign and powerful that He does everything for us and that's not true.

In other words, God will not just make you victorious over sin. He will not make you strong in the Spirit, He will not make you pray, He will not believe for you, He will not repent for you, He will not do your witnessing or good acts of service to other people for you. God may be sovereign and can do anything but He has chosen not to do certain things for His children that He commands them to do. Will He give us the grace to do it? Absolutely. As long as you follow His instructions.

I. Know

This is so important that Paul uses the word *know* at least three times in this text.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3)

At the time, the common thought among some was that if grace all the more abounds where sin abounds then why don't we sin more and get more grace? Paul says that's not biblically possible. “Don't you know that you've been united in His death and baptism? You've died to it. Don't you know?”

“knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (Romans 6:6)

The actualizing of Jesus' death as our death does not come from we trying to kill or crucify ourselves. In fact, the Bible never commands you to do that. You're not commanded in Scripture to kill or crucify yourself. That's already been done. It comes by knowing, comprehending and believing that God has already done this for us in His Son.

You counter that you already know this and you even believe that Jesus death to sin was your death to it, yet you still have difficulty. Yes, but we are not just talking about knowing something is true but knowing it as an experienced reality.

There is a knowledge we can gain by reading, hearing, observing, and experiencing. We call this acquired knowledge. You're not born with this. You're born with the ability to learn and you learn; you go to school and read books and gain information and connect the dots. Reasoning takes place and you learn. That's acquired knowledge. There is a different kind of knowledge that Paul is talking about, it is called *intuitive knowledge* or *revelation*. It's not something you learn by putting the dots together, God shows it to you in a moment. *Revelation* is a word many today don't like to use because they believe it suggests something equal to Scripture. So we use another word—*illumination*. What we mean by that word is that God gives you information and understanding supernaturally. It is not necessarily an experience of hearing voices, seeing lights, or have angels

visit you. Most likely that will not happen. But when God gives you spiritual knowledge, He is opening the eyes of your understanding and making truth real to you. It is an impartation of enlightenment or intuition. You just know it.

Often people say when God reveals or illuminates something to them that it was like having their eyes opened, or they can't explain it but by saying they "know that they know." It came to them without them reasoning the solution or connecting the dots. You just know and no matter how you describe it, the experience changes you. You may already know the information by acquired knowledge—by reasoning and connecting the dots or having read or heard the truth before—but this spiritual knowledge makes you feel like you never really knew it. You may have memorized a verse as a child in Sunday School and one day God brings that verse to your mind and it takes on life, it takes on reality. It made you feel as if you had never really knew it before.

This is the kind of knowing that the Apostle Paul means. He talks a lot about this in the New Testament. In Ephesians he prays for the Ephesian believers,

"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:17-18)

He's writing to believers who have already heard this before. He was the one who taught it to them. They knew Jesus Christ, and yet he's praying for a special kind of knowledge so that they would know Jesus and the eyes of their heart would be enlightened and would really know what the inheritance of God is in them. He talks this way many different times in the New Testament. It didn't start with Paul, though. Even David gets in on this.

"Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law." (Psalms 119:18)

He had the law, he had the Scriptures, but he's asking God to give him supernatural intuition or revelation so he might truly understand it.

For example, how do you know your sins are forgiven? You may answer, "Because the Bible says it is so." Very good, the Bible explains that if we place our faith in Christ our sins are forgiven. But I ask you, how do you know that fact is true about you? How do you know that you personally have been forgiven and accepted by God and are not deceived? How do you answer?

If you have been saved for sometime you could give me several reasons for your knowing that you are forgiven by God. You have acquired the knowledge of the evidences of the forgiveness of sins. But what if I had asked you that question a day or two after you were saved? How would you have answered then? I am reasonably sure that most of us would have said something to this effect, "I don't know how to answer that except to say, I just know. I just know something happened to me." The Holy Spirit revealed it to you! You know it's real because you experienced it

and it was real enough to create joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Well, the same is true about your death to sin. You and I need God to reveal that truth to us. We know it with our minds but we need it to be revealed to our souls. When Christ died, you died, but that fact has to be revealed to you by the Spirit. Man cannot reveal this to your Spirit. You may have acquired that information last week having heard me teach it, but the fact has not become a reality in your soul. It has not moved you to take hope that you do not have to sin and that in Christ you have already won over your sin. You still feel defeated today.

What you need is Holy Spirit teaching—and that does not come by a preacher but by the Spirit Himself. Preachers can only share information with you—we pray it is through the power of the Spirit—but only the Spirit can reveal to the Spirit. So today, what you need is the Spirit of God to make you to know that you've died to your sin.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

We need to pray that God would make Jesus' death so real that we know we have died to it as well. We need the Holy Spirit to open our hearts, not just our minds, and make it real. Only God can do this. Only the Spirit of God can reveal it to me so I know it as an actual truth. But even spiritual knowledge is not enough. I have had God teach me things and with time either forgotten them or they lose their spiritual power and I need God to revive it. You know what I'm talking about? God shows you something and it leaps within you but then six months later you can hardly remember what He showed you. There is no reality.

2. Reckon

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:11)

To reckon is to accurately account for what is true. It is a word that Paul borrowed from the field of accountants in his day because it's an accounting term to state the summary of the facts whether they be numbers or one's estate. For example, if I asked Jacob to reckon, or account for, all his baseball cards. What would that mean? It means he would get his baseball cards out and he would look at each one and log somewhere that he owns that card. He might even log the worth of that card. That's what reckoning is. It's to take an accurate assessment of things as they are.

In arithmetic accuracy is a necessity and fortunately in arithmetic accuracy is possible. One plus one is two and it will always equal two. It's two in Paducah and it's two in Washington D. C.

If I had to account for all the money that is in my pocket, which comes to exactly \$2, then I must enter into my ledger \$2 and not \$1 or \$3. Because the word *reckoning* means to call it as it is.

Reckoning has two parts:

a. Revelation

You have to properly see. But to see the Bible as truth, God has to open your eyes. Once your eyes are open you can see it and then you can believe it. When it comes to truth, you do have to see before you believe.

b. Faith

I'm sure you've heard of Watchman Nee, the famous Chinese Christian who died in a communist prison for his faith many years ago. I just want to give you his testimony. It's from the book *Normal Christianity* and I would highly recommend that book. It's easy to read and so powerful. I believe it will be helpful for you. This is what he said,

For years after my conversion I had been taught to reckon. I reckoned from 1920 until 1927. The more I reckoned that I was dead to sin, the more alive I clearly was. I simply could not believe myself dead and I could not produce the death. Whenever I sought help from others I was told to read Romans 6:11, and the more I read Romans 6:11 and tried to reckon, the further away death was: I could not get at it. I fully appreciated the teaching that I must reckon, but I could not make out why nothing resulted from it. I have to confess that for months I was troubled. I said to the Lord, 'If this is not clear, if I cannot be brought to see this which is so very fundamental, I will cease to do anything. I will not preach any more; I will not go out to serve Thee any more; I want first of all to get thoroughly clear here.' For months I was seeking, and at times I fasted, but nothing came through.

I remember one morning—that morning was a real morning and one I can never forget—I was upstairs sitting at my desk reading the Word and praying, and I said, 'Lord, open my eyes!' And then in a flash I saw it. I saw my oneness with Christ. I saw that I was in Him, and that when He died I died. I saw that the question of my death was a matter of the past and not of the future, and that I was just as truly dead as He was because I was in Him when He died. The whole thing had dawned upon me. I was carried away with such joy at this great discovery that I jumped from my chair and cried, 'Praise the Lord, I am dead!' I ran downstairs and met one of the brothers helping in the kitchen and I laid hold of him. 'Brother', I said, 'do you know that I have died?' ... "I have been crucified with Christ".

That's revelation. It's the first part of reckoning. But true revelation only comes because God revealed it. If we have not seen through the aid of the Spirit that we have died to sin with Christ, then we will not truly believe we are dead to it. There is our problem. If you still believe you're a puppet of sin, it's because you don't believe what God has said about you is true.

Reckoning is not fantasy or pretending something to be true when it isn't. I may want my \$2 to be \$10, but it's not \$2 it's \$10. Reckoning in my ledger that I have \$10 will not make it \$10. Nor is it \$1. Spiritually I may feel like I have fifty cents, but that doesn't make it fifty cents. It's still \$2. You may not feel like you're dead to Christ but it's still the truth. It's still the truth and you need to reckon it as it is.

God would not command us to reckon ourselves dead if it were not true.

But you say, "I don't feel dead to sin. I feel very much alive to it."

How do you know that Jesus died for sin? The Bible says it; therefore you know it's true. It also says when He died you died, and that's true whether you feel it or not. And when you don't feel dead to sin and that it's very alive in you, does not change the fact that you're dead to it. I may forget who I am one day, I may not remember that my name is Michael Durham, but my name is still Michael Durham.

Marriage is an excellent example of this. A man and woman stand before a preacher and congregation and exchange their wedding vows and become husband and wife. Now in the beginning after the newness wears off they have not yet accustomed themselves to being married, the man and woman may not feel married. They may not always remember that they are not two separate individuals but one. But that doesn't change the truth.

I've told this story one other time. Karen and I had only been married a few weeks at this time and she was working at Gospel Publishing House in Springfield. I needed to talk to her so I called and gave them her department. They put me through to the department and I asked for Karen by name. The secretary said, "Well, I don't know anybody by that name."

I was young and brash and begin to argue with her. "Well I know this is where she works. She's my wife, you know. She's there!"

"I'm sorry, sir, there's no one here by that name."

"I don't know who is taking care of your records but you need to get somebody else. She's there. Can I speak to someone else? Who's your manager?"

She got her manager on the phone and I again asked for Karen by name.

"Sir, I know everyone here and there is no one here by that name."

I didn't know what was happening. Where was my wife? I gave them her job description and described what she looked like.

"Well," the manager said, "that kind of sounds like Karen Durham."

“That’s who I’m talking about!” Then it dawned on me that I had called her by her maiden name. We were so newly married that I wasn’t used to her name being Durham.

Beloved, you may not feel like you’re dead to sin, but you are nonetheless if you’re His child.

3. Resist

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” (Romans 6:12)

How can he say that to Christians? How can he say to Christians, “Don’t sin! And don’t let it rule over you”? Because we have died with Christ and been saved from sin’s ruling and enslaving power. I’m not just forgiven of my sins, God has gone one step further and has broken its power of enslavement of me and dominion over me so it doesn’t own me anymore. I don’t have to do what it says anymore. He can say “don’t do this” and I now have the ability not to do it.

There is another misconception among Christians about Christian liberty. Liberty of grace does not mean you can do anything you want to do. Christian liberty places you where you can now do what God commands because before you were saved you couldn’t do one thing He commanded. Paul goes on in the latter part of chapter six to say we were slaves to unrighteousness and because of that you were free regarding righteousness. You didn’t have the liberty to be righteous because you could not do it. But now that you’re saved and have died to sin you’re now free to do whatever God commands you. You now have the ability to choose whether you obey or disobey.

The sin principle is not removed. All our reckoning will not remove it. Paul does not sin has been removed from us but that we have died to it. Therefore, since it still remains in me I must resist it. I must come against it, but not in my strength, but with the assistance of the Holy Spirit who gives grace to help. What is it I’m to do? Here are a few examples of what I mean by resisting.

You resist by not putting yourself in temptation.

If you know you have a problem with a person of the opposite sex, you’re attracted to them and you have issues with self-control, then don’t be alone with the opposite sex that’s not your spouse. If you’ve got a problem with alcohol, don’t be where that stuff is. This is a way you fight against sin, by resisting being put in the place of temptation.

You resist by fleeing temptation.

Paul tells Timothy, his saintly disciple, “Flee youthful lusts.” Run. Turn tail and run. Don’t stay there. Get out of there as quick as you can. Do what Joseph did: run. Do you know why we don’t run from our temptations? We’re not afraid of them.

Jennifer told us a story last night of finding a snake in her garage. It was time to take the boys to school but she was not going to get in the garage where that snake was—even though it was dead—and get the boys into the van and take them to school. She would rather the boys play hooky that day than go into the garage. Why? Because she is afraid of snakes.

Friends, if you were afraid of sin and you saw it rear its ugly head, enticing you to come its way, you would turn tail and run immediately. Oh God, give us a deathly fear of it!

You resist by focusing on the promises that are in Christ.

All sin is alluring, that's why we're tempted. When sin begins to entice you need to take your mind and think about what Christ has promised you and focus on His beauties. I've learned over all of these years that the reason I fall or backslide or spiritually decline, whatever you want to call it, is because Jesus is not fascinating to me anymore. Now I need something else to stimulate me, so I go looking elsewhere. How do you fight that? You fight by going back to Christ and begin to meditate and think about what you've learned about Him and His promises.

You resist by taking control of you mind and thinking on what God has commanded us to think about.

Let me tell you, if you do these few things (and there are many other ways of resisting that the New Testament talks about), you will find victory over sin and find that you have been delivered. But you've got to resist sin. Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.

4. Present

Present yourself.

*“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”
(Romans 6:13)*

What does that mean? Presenting yourself to God is a very real acknowledgment that you belong to Him and not yourself. It's the terminology of sacrifice. He'll use it again in the twelfth chapter. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

This is the terminology of sacrifice, of worship. So to present means you are acknowledging that God owns you and you don't own yourself. That's very helpful when it comes to having victory over sin. There is a great help in knowing that I am no longer my own, I belong to God. It's not up to me what I shall do. It's God's call, but He leaves me the choice. I have no right to choose sin because I don't belong to it, I belong to Him and I'm obligated to do what He says.

Just knowing that I don't belong to myself and to take my body, my mind, and my tongue to use it to not glorify Satan but the God who owns it is a tremendous help to fortify and help in the hour of temptation.

I want to conclude. You've got to *know, reckon, resist* and *present*. We're not talking about what we Baptists have championed: come to an altar, give your life to Christ and be told "That's it. You've done it." Then, maybe once or twice a year or every couple years, at a special service you'll go up front and "rededicate" your life. I'm not against rededication, by the way, I'm one of those who thinks it's not a bad idea. In fact, I think that's what this word *present* means. The problem is in how infrequently we do it. This is something that has to be done daily.

Watch this. Presentation is not just offering yourself one time, it means to offer yourself to God every single day. If you're not presenting yourself to God for His use and you're not involved in His service, then you are struggling with sin. Sin is reigning and sin is winning. I encourage you to get up with a whole new frame of thinking. Get up and find time with the Word and in prayer and say to God, "This day belongs to You, I belong to You and I'm presenting myself to You. I want You to use me to bless somebody today, to touch somebody's life, to encourage, to pray. I want to present myself to You at work where I can actually pray with someone today to glorify You."

Let me also suggest that you get involved in the ministry of this church. That's what presentation means. You're offering yourself as a sacrifice to the Lord, knowing that you belong to Him. Get involved for Jesus. Get busy for Christ. That's presentation and that has to be done everyday. *Know, reckon, resist* and *present* and you will begin to think with a new mind and identity. You will begin to realize that you are dead to sin and alive to Christ. Oh may God help us to do this. Amen.