

Freedom in Christ

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Date: 07 March 2021

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[0 : 00] So, confession. I'm not usually a fan of most rom-coms, but the film about time is one which I rather admire, well, certainly more than most.

And the reason is because the story doesn't just end when the guy gets the girl. Actually, that happens rather quickly. The story then takes us through their life together, having kids, the griefs that come when loved ones die.

It's a story that's interested in the protagonist's growth well after he's found his true love, which is usually where most rom-coms end. It's interested in depicting that messy but beautiful reality of life together.

Unlike most films in the genre, we're not left asking, what happens now? We get to see the rest of the story, and Paul, similarly, doesn't leave us asking either here in Romans.

He's really keen to show Christians just what the messy but beautiful reality of living life together with Christ looks like. The moment we believe and are united to Christ, that is a crucial moment, the crucial moment.

[1 : 07] It's the moment where we receive God's gift of life, a moment where we are saved from sin and death. That's what Paul said earlier in Romans chapter 5.

The moment that someone is united to Christ is the grand turning point in the story of their life. But the story doesn't end there.

We need to know, as Christians, what happens next. In Romans 6, Paul answers the question that Romans 5 raises. If Romans 5 is telling us about the gift of Christ and the Christians change status as someone united to Christ, well, Romans 6 starts to answer the question of, what happens now? What does this messy but beautiful reality of living life together with Christ look like? Well, according to Paul, it looks like freedom. So we have three points to work through as we consider this idea of our freedom in Christ as we're united to him.

And the points are three roads. Because really what we're thinking about is what it looks like to journey through life when we're united to Christ. So our three roads are these.

[2 : 20] First one, death is the road to life. Second one, grace is the road to freedom. The third one, obedience is the road to righteousness. Death is the road to life. Grace is the road to freedom.

Obedience is the road to righteousness. So the first road that we're going to pull onto is this idea that death is the road to life. Because union with Christ and freedom in Christ requires us to be united to Christ's death.

Paul begins by asking this question. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means. And not by no means. It's really emphatic.

We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? In other words, does union with Christ change anything? Or can we just go on as usual, indulging those sins that we've been saved from?

Well, absolutely not, says Paul. Union with Christ means that everything changes. You died to sin. You died to sin. And so it stands to reason that continuing to live in sin is now impossible.

[3 : 31] But what does that mean? What does it mean to die to sin? This is not an expression, isn't it? Well, Paul explains using the imagery of baptism in verse 3. 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.

Or live in newness of life, as some translations have it. Jesus died on the cross. He died a real, physical death. And as he did that, he took the punishment for every sin.

Every sin that you or I have ever committed, or ever will, was paid for on that cross, in that death. Now, here's the fascinating thing.

When someone believes in Jesus, they die as well. Now, they become united at Jesus' death, and they die on the cross with him. That might sound a bit strange, but in some ways it is.

[4 : 36] But Paul is saying that if you follow Jesus, and if you call him Lord, then you died on that cross with him. And that, Paul says, is what Christian baptism speaks about.

If you're a Christian, when you were baptized into Christ, at whatever age, you were baptized into his death. Just as the water comes over you, so you were in the tomb with Christ.

And just as the stone was rolled away, and Christ was resurrected, so you have been resurrected to new life. Baptism is a picture of union with Christ in this movement from death to life that the Christian experiences.

The gift of life comes through our death. Our union with Christ's death leads to union with Christ's life. That's why this point is about death being the road to life.

Because when we die with Christ, we are able then to be raised with Christ. Paul summarizes it rather neatly in verse 5. For if we've been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

[5 : 55] And in verse 6 we get the purpose. Here is Paul's response to those wondering what happens now. To be a slave is a demeaning, cruel, and torturous existence.

You don't need me to tell you that. We'll probably remember the statue of Edward Colston being pulled down and thrown into the water of Bristol Harbour in June. There is justifiable anger at a man who enslaved thousands of men, women, and children literally being placed on a pedestal.

Slavery is not a condition that anyone wants to be subjected to. We all agree with that. The good news for someone who has died with Christ is that they are no longer a slave to the arch-enslaver of this world.

Sin. All humanity begins their life as a slave. We are slaves from birth to sin. And part of the Bible's message is to wake the world up to that reality.

And then provide the sword that breaks the chain. Christ is the sword. And his death breaks the power of sin. Slavery to sin is not life.

[7 : 22] That's why Jesus came to break the chain. That's why we die with him. The moment someone dies with Christ, sin's reign in their body ends and real life then begins.

Paul puts it like this in verse 8. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again.

Death no longer has mastery or lordship over him. When Jesus entered the world as a man, he subjected himself to death, even though he was God himself and was guilty of no sin.

And death for a brief spell had power over him. Jesus died and his cold corpse lay in a tomb for three days. But then by the power of God, he was resurrected.

And he can no longer die. We saw last week that sin and death are intimately connected. Death entered the world through sin. When Jesus dealt with sin on the cross, death too was dealt with.

[8 : 26] And so death no longer had any claim on Jesus. And he lives today in heaven with his father and ours. As Paul puts in verse 10, he died, he died to sin once and he lives.

He lives to God. And in verse 11, Paul makes it crystal clear why this matters for the person who has been united to Christ.

He says, in the same way, in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Because if you are united to Christ, if you died with Christ, if you've been given resurrection life with Christ, all through believing in Christ, well, then Christ's experience has become ours.

Faith brings his union with Christ. And union with Christ means his death becomes ours and his life becomes ours. That's why Paul can say, in the same way as Jesus, count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in him.

That's what our union with Christ achieves. And the implication of this is that it brings us freedom from sin. Because as Paul says, anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

[9 : 40] Union with Christ means that you are no longer a slave to sin. In Christ is freedom's call. And that brings us to our second point.

Grace is the road to freedom. That's what Paul is saying in verse 14. Once we were under the law. That's Paul's way of saying that we were under condemnation for our sins. And there was nothing that we could do to make amends. But Jesus on the cross did make amends.

He took the punishment. And as we've said, opened up the way for those who believe in him to be united to him. That's grace. That free gift of God in Christ.

Let's read verse 11 again. Because it's clear from that verse that an important step on the road to freedom is recognizing that you are free. In the same way, count yourselves.

[10:42] Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. In other words, you need to understand your new status. A sprinter who's just won the 100 metres of the Olympics isn't going to refuse the gold medal or the place on the podium.

A newly appointed prime minister isn't going to avoid making his way to 10 Downing Street. And a slave who has been freed isn't going to sign themselves up for enslavement again.

When you receive a new and better status, especially freedom, you don't ignore the change. You embrace the change. As David Bowie sang, turn and face the strange changes.

That is going to have to be a different man. Now, admittedly, I suspect that Bowie probably didn't have in mind the changes that come when someone is united to Christ. But there is no stranger or more radical change.

And there's going to have to be a different man or woman because of those changes. And that's the point that Paul's making in verse 12. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

[11:56] Because that's what you used to do. You used to let sin reign in your body, controlling your mind and your actions. But now things have changed. If you've been united to Christ, you have changed.

It's no longer you who lives, but it's Christ who lives in you. And Christ is now your king, not sin. So don't let sin pretend that it has the throne anymore.

A revolution has taken place. And when a revolution takes place, well, it makes little sense to allow the tyrant to take his throne again. And make no mistake, sin is a tyrant.

And yet, subtly and slyly, like the serpent in Eden, sin will try and take the throne back. What the Christian has to do is keep tossing sin away.

Like Colson was torn off his pedestal and thrown into the water. Well, so the Christian needs to keep pulling sin off its pedestal and casting it far away.

[12:58] The reason it's possible to do this is because the throne isn't empty. But the person who's united to Christ, the throne of your life, belongs to him.

Jesus is king. The Scottish theologian Thomas Chambers called this the expulsive power of a new affection. The person who's united to Christ is able to replace their old affections that they once lavished upon sin.

They can replace them with new and greater affections that they now lavish upon Jesus. Jesus is on the throne. And so sin can be expelled into oblivion.

Because the Christian has changed. And the Christian now only has eyes for Christ. So because Jesus is king, Paul goes on in verse 13 to say, Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument or as a weapon of wickedness.

But rather, offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

[14:16] If Christ is your king, and if you are united to him, says Paul, don't let sin wield your body as a weapon. You're free from that tyrant now.

And sin does try to use our bodies as a weapon. A weapon against others, but probably chiefly against ourselves. You ask any Christian, they'll tell you that going back to the sin from which they have been freed, it's just not worth it.

It's like asking to be put back in chains just to see what they feel like again. When you put them on, you realise just how awful they are. How much they weigh you down.

How painful they are around your wrists and your ankles. You can never be comfortable in your chains once you've tasted freedom. Which is why Paul tells the Roman Christians to offer themselves instead to God.

He's the one who has freed us in Christ. And as we shouldn't offer any part of ourselves to sin, well, we should instead offer every part of ourselves to God.

[15:21] Because God will use us as an instrument of righteousness. When God rules in our lives, he changes us. And it means our lives are now marked by righteousness.

Your sin shall no longer be your master because you are under grace. Now, as we think about all this, it might be that you don't know Jesus yourself.

And it might be that this sounds great for folks who believe it. But it's just not for you. Well, fortunately, the reality is that without Christ, you are a slave to sin.

And sin's a clever master. It uses smoke and mirrors to make us think that we're the master. But really, it's sin that's pulling the strings.

C.S. Lewis once wrote pretty astutely, If you look at the present state of the world, it is pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake.

[16:24] We are on the wrong road, he says. I think that comments age rather well. Because when we look at the world, it doesn't look like humanity seems to be getting any better.

Injustice still thrives. Wars and violence continue. Lives continue to be broken every minute of every day. Relationships are constantly collapsing.

Addictions cripple people. And looking out for number one, that's the dominant value, really. These things happen because humanity is enslaved to sin.

But you might come back and say, Well, what evidence is there that you as an individual are enslaved to sin? All that stuff, that's out there. That happens to people out there. That happens to other people.

Not to me. But I'd ask you the question, Who does control your life? Because if the answer is yourself, Well, the Bible says that's sin being in control.

[17:26] When sin is in control, the foundation of what we do, ultimately, is our desires. Sometimes these desires work out for us. Sometimes not.

But desire is the impetus for our every action. And those desires, those desires are the chains of sin. That's why the world looks the way it does.

Everyone is following their own compass and their own desires. And the result is it creates chaos, pain and heartache. And the proof, as C.S. Lewis said, is in the state of the world.

We are, as he said, on the wrong road. And to think that you might be the miraculous exception to this rule, that would be arrogance of the highest degree.

There's only one miraculous exception. Only one without sin. And that's Christ. And that's why, that's why union with him is the only road to freedom.

[18:29] It's only when we've heard freedom's call, when we become united to Christ, and he lives in us, that we're able to be on the right road. And it's at this point that Christians can then recognize their sin and start to resist it.

Sin doesn't like this. Every Christian will tell you that there is, there's an ongoing fight with sin. A fight which unfortunately doesn't end until we die and go to Jesus or Jesus comes back.

But the key thing Paul is telling us is that sin is no longer in charge. So yeah, you'll never be totally free from sin in this life. We're united to Christ, but our bodies are still fallen.

They're still affected by sin. But nevertheless, sin is not the ruling power. Sin has no authority over the person united to Christ.

And that's the point that Paul is making. I wonder if you saw the viral video of Hanforth Parish Council and the stoic efforts of Jackie Weaver to maintain some kind of order in their chaotic Zoom meeting.

[19:36] If you haven't, it's a good laugh. I highly recommend it. I've watched it too many times already. But sin, sin can be like the bullying chairman who, determined to assert his authority, uttered the hugely quotable line, you have no authority here, Jackie Weaver, no authority at all.

And sin, sin loves to tell those who are united to Jesus that Jesus has no authority here, no authority at all.

Now, if you've seen the video, when the chairman utters that seemingly decisive line, what happens is he gets kicked out of the Zoom meeting. It seemed that actually, Jackie Weaver did have power and authority when she removed the chairman.

Well, she kind of proved it. when Christ is our king, when we are united to him, we can kick sin out of the Zoom meeting, as it were.

Because Christ is the new ruling authority. We can kick sin out time and time again. And the way we do so, and this is where the challenge comes in, is choosing to follow the road of obedience.

[20:50] And this brings us to our third and final point. Obedience is the road to righteousness. We don't always talk about obedience to God, perhaps as often as we should.

It sounds perhaps rather archaic. It perhaps sounds rather legalistic. And yet, Paul goes on at the end of chapter 6 to press home the importance of obedience which leads to righteousness. What then, says Paul in verse 15, shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means. Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey?

Whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. So obedience, according to Paul, is key to union with Christ because it shows who is your king. If sin is the master you obey, then that is who you serve and that is the road you're on, a road which leads to death. But if Christ is the one you obey, then your obedience will lead you to righteousness.

[21 : 58] Either way, you've got to obey someone. And that's why Paul says that Christians are now slaves to righteousness. Look what he says in verse 17, Union with Christ means that those who believe in Jesus are free from sin and now have a better ruling power.

Freedom from sin through union with Christ means that Christians can now obey from their heart the pattern of teaching that they are allied to in Christ. And there is no other way than this to be free from sin.

You can't escape sin and its effects but leave Christ out of the equation. It just doesn't work. In the same way that every revolution installs a new leader, so does the revolution that comes when we are united to Christ.

Anarchy is not an option because sin will just rise up again and again. The only one who can stop sin is Jesus. Which is why freedom actually makes us slaves to a new and better power, Christ's righteousness.

Now, obviously, we labored earlier in this talk how terrible slavery is. But slavery to righteousness is not like our slavery to sin. Even Paul admits that the image doesn't entirely capture what he's saying.

[23 : 33] He says in verse 19 that I'm using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. But here's how he explains what it means to be a slave of righteousness.

Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

because there are only two ways of living. The first is the way in which we come into the world, the way of sin, the way whereby we offer up ourselves to various sinful impulses and desires day after day.

It's the way of our own desire. That's the human condition, the way in which most people live. And it often feels like freedom, but the more you think about it, the more you realize that you're enthralled to sin and its desires.

It's the one in control. Second way, the better way, the true way of freedom is the way of union with Christ. A way where because we are free from sin's clutches, we can offer ourselves freely as slaves to righteousness.

[24 : 44] What this means is that we can reject those old sinful impulses in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can choose to do what is righteous, or good, and we can grow in holiness.

That is, to reflect God's own character and God's own desires rather than our own. To live a life that is set apart and different, characterized by Christ and not by sin, that is the way of union with Christ. In effect, through our obedience to God, we are able to live out our freedom. And that's the only way it's possible to live out our freedom from sin. Christ unites us to himself and makes us righteous with his righteousness.

And when we live out our union with him, we will and should choose the path of obedience, living out that righteousness that we've been given. The two roads.

There's no third way. Anyway, even if there was a third way, why would you take it when the way of union with Christ is so wonderful? The first way has absolutely no benefits going for it.

[25 : 56] Paul makes that clear in verse 20. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you're now ashamed of?

Those things result in death. If you're not following Jesus, I accept that this won't be quite as clear. But every Christian who reflects on their old life and their old sin looks back and asks, what was the point of that?

When we reflect on our past sins, I imagine we're in total agreement with Paul. We see only shame in them. We see them for what they are.

Thoughts, words and actions that lead to death. But now, says Paul, now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life.

But the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Sin exacts a toll. There is a price to be paid for continuing in sin.

[27 : 05] And that price is death. But life, real life, that is the gift of union with Christ. And choosing Christ and choosing obedience to him every day is the clearest way in which we can reject our old slavery to sin.

Obedience to Christ is, put simply, the expression of true freedom. Indulging our freedom to sin is slavery to sin. Slavery to righteousness is the freedom to be righteous.

Now, if you're using the road metaphor as we consider life in union with Christ, it seems only appropriate to illustrate with a quote from Jack Kerouac's classic book *On the Road*. Kerouac writes, What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plane till you see their specks dispersing?

It's the too huge world vaulting us and it's goodbye. Or we lean forward to the next crazy venture under the skies.

In Christ, we join a new road and we leave the specks of sin's authority dispersing in the distance. Instead, we pursue a new crazy venture of obedience to Christ.

[28 : 27] Obedience might not sound like a crazy venture, but that's only if you haven't joined the Jesus road. Actually, once you get on that road, you'll realize that following Christ is the greatest adventure and is true life and freedom.

So where does all this leave us? Well, we set out to see just what the messy but beautiful reality of living life together with Christ looks like. And it's a journey.

We still fight against sin. We still struggle with temptation and sinful desires, but sin is no longer the authority in our lives. Union with Christ means sin no longer calls the shots.

Living on the Jesus road, well, it doesn't always sit well with our world, does it? Christ's righteousness doesn't always square with the way that culture sees things. But that's okay. that's expected. After all, the world doesn't know Christ. It follows the road of sin, the road to death. True freedom, true life is worth looking different for.

[29 : 33] The true love of Christ at work within us is worth everything that we might possibly come up against. The joy of union with Christ is the most wonderful, freeing existence presence.

And it's ours when we choose to follow him. And so, if this is the reality, even if you're finding the road of life particularly hard and trying at the moment, I want you to be encouraged that there truly is no better road than freedom through union with Christ.

And if you haven't joined the Jesus road yet, let Kerouac be your teacher. He writes, I was surprised as always by how easy the act of leaving was and how good it felt.

The world was suddenly rich with possibility. Well, union with Christ opens up a world rich with freedom and possibility if we only leave the chains of sin behind.