

# Living in Christ

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     A lot of people tend to assume that Christianity is all about rules and is a religion obsessed with commandments. Over the past few weeks, what I hope that we've seen in our studies in Union with Christ is that Christianity is chiefly about being united to Christ.
- This means that Christianity is fundamentally about what Christ has done. The Union with Christ comes because Christ died for sins and defeated death in his resurrection.
- But as we've motioned towards, Union with Christ does mean that people change. The source of our Union with Christ is Christ, and he works in us by his Spirit.
- The presence of the Spirit of Christ means that those who are united to Christ are able to live in Christ. And this is why people can often assume that Christianity is obsessed with how you live your life.
- We need to be clear. No one can save themselves by what they do or by how they live. Not one person is capable of saving themselves from sin.
- [ 1 : 16 ]     It's Jesus alone that saves. But once a Christian has been saved from sin and death, there is now a new life that stretches forward ahead of them.
- The Spirit of Christ enables us to live in a way that pleases Christ and reflects our union with him. As Paul said in his letter to the Galatians, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.
- The life I now live in the body of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. So in our final reflection on Union with Christ in Romans, we're going to be thinking about some basic principles for living in Christ.
- Romans chapters 12 to 13 are where Paul begins to apply his explanation of the gospel, which he's been pursuing in the previous 11 chapters up to this point.
- And ideally, we'd look at both chapters, but if we did that, we might be here until the lockdown lifts. So instead, we're going to look at the start of chapter 12 and the end of chapter 13, those sections which Jonathan just read for us.
- [ 2 : 29 ]     These basically bookend Paul's reflections on how to live in Christ, and they provide us with a framework for how to live in union with him. So that's going to be our focus this morning.
- And there's two main principles, two main principles that I want to share with you. The first is that our lives are now lives of worship. The second is that our lives are now lives of war.
- And the key thing to remember as we look at both of these principles and consider them is that they are made possible by our union with Christ and the presence of his Holy Spirit in our lives.
- So the verses at the start of chapter 12, they act as a kind of headline for the rest of Paul's instructions to follow. And they get to the heart of what it means to live in Christ. Life in Christ is, first and foremost, a life of worship.
- Paul says, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

[ 3 : 38 ] This is your true and proper worship. The therefore, which Paul begins with, really refers back to the whole of the letter so far.

The mercies which God has shown to his people have been explained and unpacked in each consecutive section of Paul's letter to the Romans. We might even sum up God's mercies as our union with Christ.

For this is the good news of the gospel. As Paul said earlier, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is his mercy toward all those in it. The gift of Christ himself. Paul tells the Romans that given these mercies which God has shown to them in Christ, they are to now offer up their bodies as a living sacrifice to him.

So if you're united to Christ and if you have received God's mercy, then this instruction is incredibly relevant for you. I think in our culture and our time, we tend to use the language of sacrifice really quite readily as a metaphor.

[ 4 : 50 ] For example, Beyonce has said that power means hard work and sacrifice. Lionel Messi has said that you have to fight to reach your dream. You have to sacrifice and work hard for it.

And Shakira, you can't achieve anything in life without a small amount of sacrifice. So according to these philosophers of our age, sacrifice is all about giving up things in our life in order to achieve our goals and effectively to make our idols a reality.

And I think what they say is really quite representative. When we think of sacrifice, we often think of it basically as a means to an end, something we give up to receive something else. Not all the time, but I suspect often.

Paul's understanding of sacrifice is so much deeper and is much more countercultural. For a start, his understanding of sacrifice is rooted in the world of Old Testament sacrifice.

A lot of the words that Paul uses in these two verses are words which really have strong temple worship connotations. The Old Testament temple, after all, was where God's people used to go to worship and offer sacrifices to God.

[ 5 : 58 ] And these sacrifices were the heart of their worship. There's a reason that books in the Old Testament like Leviticus spend so much time detailing all the different sorts of sacrifices and their function.

It's because they were core to the life of worship expected of God's people in the days before Jesus came. Of course, when Jesus came, things changed.

That's why when we get back together next Sunday, we're not going to be bringing sheep. We've been sacrificing them together. Jesus' death was the sacrifice that all those Old Testament sacrifices were pointing towards.

His death atones for and covers over the sins of those who are united to him. But, according to Paul, the life of God's people is still to be a life of sacrifice.

And that's the key thing. Union with Christ demands our whole lives to be sacrificed in worship. Remembering that Old Testament sacrifice involved the death of an animal, this should alert us to the cost of New Testament sacrifice.

[ 7 : 09 ] We're not expected to shed blood on an altar, thankfully. But we are expected to give our lives. And that's what it means to be a living sacrifice.

I'm reminded of what Jesus said to his disciples about the cost of discipleship. Jesus said, Jesus there is talking about being a living sacrifice.

Taking up an instrument of death, a cross, and following him. We've got to be honest. Union with Christ is not an easy road. It will draw blood and it will draw tears from us.

But we do it because of our union with Christ and the gift of salvation. The sacrifice, the living sacrifice that we live, is not a sacrifice in vain.

In comparison then to the sacrifices that Beyonce, Messi, and Shakira were talking about, the Christian's life of sacrifice is a whole lot more hopeful.

[ 8 : 26 ] Because even if you give up key parts of your life to achieve your goals and your dreams, there's no promise you're going to be successful. It's very easy for the lucky few to preach about how to be as rich and famous as they are and how to give up certain things to achieve those dreams.

Let's be honest, there's no guarantee at all for the rest of us. But there is a guarantee in being united to Christ, which is why it's worth offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.

What Paul means when he talks about offering our bodies is devoting our whole being, body and soul, to worshipping Christ. This is, as Paul says, our true and proper worship, which is holy and pleasing to God.

And what's clear from Paul's image of a living sacrifice is that worship is not just limited to certain days or certain practices. We can sometimes refer to our music when we meet together as worship, and it is certainly that.

But worship is also so much more. More even than when we gather together. That is our public community worship. But what Paul is saying is that also our whole lives are worship.

[ 9 : 39 ] Our whole lives are a living sacrifice. Jesus once said that true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. What he meant was that worship is not limited to a particular place and time.

True worship is in the spirit of Christ, and he is with us all the time through our union with Christ. So worship time is all the time. Every day is a day of cross-shaped, cross-centered sacrifice in the name of Christ.

But we haven't yet considered what exactly this sacrifice looks like. We haven't considered the specifics. But Paul shows us in verse 2.

He says, Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Sacrifice begins in our minds. We suggested last week that the mind of the Christian is rooted in the habits of sin, because although we have been united to Christ, our bodies and our brains still bear the marks of the fall.

[ 10 : 55 ] We have habits and we have addictions to sin that war against our very soul. And so in order to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we have to renew our minds.

And it's when our minds are renewed that we will be able to test and approve what God's will is. What Paul means when he says that is that we will have a clearer idea of what constitutes holy behavior.

Behavior that reflects God and the set-apart nature of his church. It means that we'll have a clearer idea of the sorts of behaviors which please God and match up with his morality, as he's revealed it in his word.

And it means that we will live in a way that is Christ-like. Paul says in Romans 8, For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

So the journey, the journey of the one who's united to Christ, is a journey of becoming more like him and reflecting his image in our own lives, being conformed to the image of Christ.

[ 12 : 05 ] And this is not just like dressing up for a fancy dress party. Outward change is not true change. The Pharisees of Jesus' day outwardly looked very, very godly.

But their hearts were set on themselves, and they had no true love for God, and they even killed his son. Paul is talking about inner change, mind renewal.

This is more like method acting than sticking on a costume. Daniel Day-Lewis is famous for his method acting. When performing the role of Abraham Lincoln, he refused to break character when the cameras stopped rolling, and everyone had to keep calling him Mr. Preston and treating him like Lincoln.

Now, I have to confess, I think that kind of behavior borders on the psychologically challenged. But it illustrates the point. Your old life is gone.

Your new life, if you are united to him, is Christ. Even that word transformed that Paul uses points towards the future that we're receiving as those who've been united to Christ.

[ 13 : 20 ] Paul says to the Corinthian Christians that we are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. And it reminds us of Jesus' own transfiguration, where he was transformed before the eyes of his disciples, and they saw his glory.

These are the only times that the New Testament speaks of transformation. So a New Testament understanding of transformation is linked to our future, where we will share in Christ's glory.

And it begins here. It begins here in our present union with Christ. Be transformed, says Paul, by the renewing of your mind.

Transformation is a process which occurs by the power of the Spirit. It also requires us to follow the Spirit's lead and be engaged ourselves in this process of mind renewal.

Why is mind renewal so necessary? Well, it's because it's all too easy, even as those who are united to Christ, to be conformed to the pattern of this age, as Paul says in this verse.

[ 14 : 35 ] So what do we fill our minds with? We're surrounded by the pattern of this world. The music we listen to, the TV that we switch on after a long day at work, the social media that we scroll through.

All of these are almost exclusively promoting the values and the idols of this present world. Perhaps never before have people been so bombarded by content that carries the world's values.

And it's worth saying that there is no such thing as neutral content. Everything is shaped by a worldview and a philosophy. Now what I'm not advocating is total disengagement, but I want us to see that we are silently being shaped by the pattern of this world because through technology and through culture, this world never leaves us alone.

So Paul's urging of believers to be transformed by the renewing of their mind becomes perhaps even more urgent in our cultural moment.

And the road to mind renewal and transformation, well, that's going to start with listening to the voice of God and fixing our eyes on Christ and what is eternal rather than fixing our eyes on this world.

[ 15 : 54 ] Where we live busy lives, that's part of the problem of this world. It's always switched on. But that's precisely why we need to prioritize time in God's Word, the Bible.

It's why it's essential that we try and dedicate time to prayer. Because it's only when we come to God and listen to Him that we're going to be able to renew our minds in the Spirit and live out God's will for us.

Allow me to illustrate this with a story from Greek myth. Jason and his crew of mariners on the Argo were passing the dreaded seas of the Sirens.

The song of the Sirens was so enticing that men would jump from the ship to their death. Jason knew this, but he had a plan up his sleeve. On board his ship was the legendary musician Orpheus.

And as they passed the Sirens, Orpheus played louder and much more beautifully than the song that the Sirens produced, drowning out their song of death and saving Jason and his crew.

[ 17 : 00 ] You know, with Christ, because of it, what we need to keep coming back to Christ, we are surrounded by the Siren call of sin and the world. And conforming to it is to jump to our death.

So what the Christian needs, like the crew members of the Argo, we need the more beautiful music of Christ, and we need it regularly.

There's no other route to mind renewal in this mindless age. The illustration of the Sirens is helpful in another way, because it reminds us that we are engaged in a battle.

The life of the Christian is not just a life of worship, but it's a life of war. The Sirens sang with evil intent, just as the devil uses the world with evil intent.

He doesn't want people to be united to Christ, and he certainly doesn't want people worshipping God in this world. So in order to live a life of worship in Christ, we've got to strap on our armour.

[ 18 : 05 ] This takes us to chapter 13, and our second point. Paul says in verse 12 of this chapter, Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

That word for armour there, it more literally means weapon. To be united to Christ is to go out with the weapons of light into the dangerous darkness. I mentioned earlier that Paul isn't advocating disengagement from the world.

This is why. The Christian engages with the world, but with their guard up, and with their weapons of light at the ready. The reason Paul uses this image of weapons of light is because the world is characterised by darkness.

Paul says in verse 11, The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over, the day is almost here.

This world is in darkness. It's very easy, very easy to join the throng of this world, enthralled to its lies, and just kind of sleepwalk through it.

[ 19 : 16 ] Paul calls those who are united to Christ to wake up, because our salvation is nearer now than the time when we first believed. To be united to Christ is to be saved from sin and its penalty, but we're still to receive the full riches of salvation.

As Romans makes clear, the law of sin and death still have power in this world. That full salvation will come when Jesus Christ returns. So every day, we're moving closer to this salvation that's coming.

The night of this world is nearly over. The day of Christ is coming soon. And because the day of Christ is coming, we should live a life that reflects our union with Christ.

C.S. Lewis, in his essay, The World's Last Night, really helpfully shows why the reality of Christ coming back should shape the way we live. Allow me to quote at length from Lewis.

He writes, A man of 70 needs not always be feeling, much less talking, about his approaching death. But a wise man of 70 should always take it into account. He would be foolish to embark on schemes which presuppose 20 more years of life.

[ 20 : 30 ] He would be criminally foolish, indeed, not to have made long since his will. Now, what death is to each man, the second coming is to the whole human race.

We all believe, I suppose, that a man should sit loose to his own individual life, should remember how short, precarious, temporary, and provisional a thing it is, should never give all his heart to anything that will end when his life ends.

What modern Christians find it harder to remember is that the whole life of humanity in this world is also precarious, temporary, provisional.

I think it's a really helpful quote, and it reminds us that the world's last night will come, and every day is bringing us one step closer. Because of this certainty, we should be wise and always take it into account.

And in taking Christ's return seriously and the arrival of the day, we need to equip ourselves for battle. Paul goes on, so let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

[ 21 : 44 ] Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. So we may live in the darkness in the midst of people who are sleepwalking through the night, but we are to live in advance of the coming day.

It's a bit like when you get up early to catch a flight, something most of us probably haven't done for a while now. It feels kind of wrong being awake and dressed when it's three in the morning. It's still dark, it's cold, you feel groggy, and you'd rather be in bed.

But you know that the sunrise is coming and you know that without being up and ready, you're going to miss your flight. So the rest of the world may still be in bed, but the Christian has to be dressed for the daytime because the day is coming and Christ is returning.

Moving away from images into what this actually means, Paul gives us some specifics. It means a different ethic when it comes to alcohol, for example. Paul says that those in Christ aren't to get drunk or engage in the activities that accompany drunken behavior.

That's as counter-cultural today as it was in first century Rome. Those in Christ are to have a different sexual ethic to their culture. Paul says that sexual immorality and debauchery, they're out the window too.

[ 23 : 07 ] That is, any sexual practice outside of marriage is not behavior that matches the coming day. Again, this is counter-cultural just in the same way it was in first century Rome.

And Paul rules out any sorts of behaviors that cause division. Those in Christ are not to argue, they're not to cause dissension with one another, nor are they to indulge any feelings of jealousy.

These are the examples that Paul gives. It's not an exhaustive list, but perhaps these sins and behaviors were the ones that Roman Christians were most easily tempted to and seduced by.

If so, their temptations weren't so far from ours. The abuse of God's gift of sex, so very easy for us to give in to. Whether it be pornography, sex before or outside of marriage, or transgressive sexualities, we are bombarded by temptation, which is why we need to put on the weapons of light.

The abuse of God's gift of alcohol, again, is really easy for us to give in to. Especially when we're able to meet together with friends again, the slippery slope to overindulgence, and loss of control, is a dangerous slope indeed, which is why we need to put on the weapons of light.

[ 24 : 26 ] And the abuse of God's gift of community is really easy for us to give in to. Instead of selflessness and kindness, we often find it easier to complain about others and indulge our feelings of envy and jealousy.

Even, perhaps especially, within the church, this can be a really easy temptation. Division and dissension, though, is the weapon of the devil, which is why we need to put on the weapons of light.

What does this mean? What does this mean to put on the weapons of light? Well, it means clothing ourselves with Christ. As Paul says in the last verse of chapter 13, rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

So our lives of war link back to what Paul said in chapter 12 about the mind. This battle is, in a sense, fought primarily in the mind.

With a renewed mind, we will be able to resist the siren calls of this world and we won't think about how to gratify or satisfy those sinful desires of our flesh.

[ 25 : 37 ] Peter, in his first letter, makes a rather similar statement. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

And again, he says, be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. The renewal of our minds is going to help us.

It's going to help us in our fight against sin and the devil. As we said at the start, it's not our own willpower that makes this possible. It's not ourselves that enables this.

It is the spirit of Christ and our union with Christ that enables us to fight the good fight and win our personal battles against sin and temptation.

Indeed, the great victory, that's already been won. Jesus' death defeated sin and Jesus' resurrection defeated death. And in both, he proclaimed total victory over the devil.

[ 26 : 42 ] So Paul could say with confidence in Romans 8 that because of our union with Christ, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Christ has won the war and in our personal battles against sin and flesh, Christ the victor gives us strength in his spirit to resist temptation and resist desire.

Although united to Christ, there is a sense that we must be putting on Christ daily. It's not that we stop being united to him when we go to sleep, but living in Christ requires a daily decision each morning to put on Christ and follow the lead of the spirit.

When we put on Christ daily, choosing daily to live our life in him, we will be equipped to live lives of war and ready to offer our lives as lives of worship.

And so as we finish, the day of Christ and this world's last night is moving steadily nearer. This has implications for those who are in Christ and those who are not.

If you're not in Christ, all is called to wake up. I say he's especially applicable to you. This world offers very, very little. And I recognize that that might not sound terribly convincing on first hearing, but I'd encourage you to reflect on just what union with Christ actually offers and the eternal blessings that come with it.

[ 28 : 17 ] Because the day of Christ is coming and he wants you to be ready. If you are in Christ, there's no guarantee that the days that we have left before our death or Christ's return are going to be easy.

In fact, they're probably going to be very hard. But in Christ, we are equipped to live in expectation of the coming day. And so every day, let's put on Christ and his weapons of light, ready to go into battle for the sake of Christ who died for us.

Every day, let's renew our minds and make time to focus on Christ and drown out the siren calls of this world with the music of the gospel and God's word.

Every day, let's offer up our whole lives as a living sacrifice to God because we have been united to Christ.

And then, when Christ, who we are united to, finally comes back, we will enjoy perfect union with him forever. And so we beat on like boats against the current of this world, living lives of worship and lives of war, living in union with Christ, in light of our future with Christ.