

Union with Christ Brings Christians Triumph Over Sin:

An Exegesis paper on Romans 6:5-11

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Some Christians may be unclear about their position and condition in Christ, such as, "We are regenerated with a new nature, but why do we still sin?" "Do we still have an old self? If so, what is it?" "Has not the redemptive work of Jesus Christ set us free?" These questions, if left unanswered, can easily lead to legalism or antinomianism. Thus, this paper takes Romans 6:5-11 as the object of exegesis to understand Paul's arguments to prove that union with Christ brings triumph over sin. These are the main points: Christians are united with the death and resurrection of Christ, which is passive, experiential, and transformative; Christians are united with the death of Christ, which brought their release from sin; Christians are united with the resurrection of Christ, which brought them the new life and no longer under sin; Christians are supposed to count themselves identified with Christ by faith. In the theological analysis, there will be an explanation of how union with Christ fulfills the promises of God in the perspective of biblical theology; there will also be a systematic theological perspective in which union with Christ demonstrates the character of the salvation work of the Triune God and the ground of Christian sanctification.

Background and Context

First, the author of Romans is Paul. "Paul probably wrote Romans around 55–58, shortly after Claudius's death."¹ The theme of Romans is the gospel, and Christ will save all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles (Romans 1:16-17).

Second, concerning the context, "having been justified by faith" summarizes the

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 424.

argument of Romans 1:18–4:25. Assurance of glory is, then, the overarching theme in Romans 5-8.² In the second main section, Paul affirms this assurance of sharing in the glory of God. “Nothing can stand in its way: not death (5:12–21), not sin (chap. 6), not the law (chap. 7)—nothing! (chap. 8). What God has begun, having justified and reconciled us, he will bring to a triumphant conclusion, and save us from wrath.”³

Lastly, there is a chiasm structure: A. 5:1-11 assurance of future glory; B. 5:12-21 basis for this assurance in work of Christ; C. 6:1-23 the problem of sin; C'. 7:1-25 the problem of the law; B'. 8:1-17 ground of assurance in the work of Christ, mediated by the Spirit A'. 8:18-39 assurance of future glory.⁴ The problem of sin is closely related to the problem of the law, and Christians are given the assurance of future glory because of Christ's work of salvation. In Romans 6:5-11, Paul is concerned with the tension between the fact that Christians already have a glorious assurance yet are still influenced by sin and that the way out of that is union with Christ.

Characteristics of the union with Christ

6:5 εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγονάμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα.⁵

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 292-293.

³ *Ibid*, 293.

⁴ *Ibid*, 294.

⁵ Barbara Aland and et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, fifth rev. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Romans 6:5.

The translation of verse 5 is that “Because if we have been united in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be (the likeness) of the resurrection.”

First, union with Christ is relational. “σύμφυτος” is an adjective that appears only once in the New Testament, pertaining to being associated in a related experience, *identified with*. It has the meaning of “grown together.”⁶ Campbell interpreted the term in four aspects:

Union gathers up faith union with Christ, mutual indwelling, trinitarian, and nuptial notions. *Participation* conveys partaking in the events of Christ’s narrative. *Identification* refers to believers’ location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship. *Incorporation* encapsulates the corporate dimensions of membership in Christ’s body. Together these four terms function as ‘umbrella’ concepts, covering the full spectrum of Pauline language, ideas, and themes that are bound up in the metatheme of ‘union with Christ.’⁷

“Union” has a rich meaning beyond itself in verse 5.

Second, union with Christ is passive and transformational. The usage of “γεγόναμεν” here is to experience a change in nature and so indicate entry into a new condition, *become something*. And it is used with an adj. to paraphrase the passive.⁸ Regarding the Bible translation, the KJV translates it as “have been planted together.” ESV and NASB translate it as “has been united with.” LEB translates it as “has been identified.” These translations take into account passivity. Except for LEB, other versions favor the perspective of “grow together.” Considering the semantic match of the two words, “σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν” would be translated into “we have been united,” which emphasize that Christians passively experience a

⁶ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 960.

⁷ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union With Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 413.

⁸ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 198.

transformation in relationship and condition.

Lastly, the specific object to which Christians are united here is the same death and resurrection of Christ. “ὁμοιώματι” appears six times in the New Testament, which has two semantic meanings, “state of having common experiences, *likeness*” and “state of being similar in appearance, *image, form*.”⁹ The second meaning is found in Romans 1:23, “images resembling mortal man” and Revelation 9:7, “In appearance the locusts.” The connection between Christians and the death of Christ cannot be in *image* or *form*. Therefore, “ὁμοιώματι” here means *likeness*. Further, it is necessary to understand either united with the likeness of his death or united to him in a death (like his).¹⁰ “Many scholars think that ‘likeness of his death’ is the *means* by which the believer is united with Christ....But this is not the most natural reading of the syntax. It is preferable to take ‘likeness of his death’ as the object with which we are ‘joined’...”¹¹ In other words, the syntactic function of this phrase indicates that Christians have been united in the same death that he died. This is no more a physical, or ontological, death than is our burial with Christ. Paul’s language throughout is forensic, or positional; it is status, or power structure, that Paul is talking about here. Just as Christ’s crucifixion meant his release from the realm of sin (6:10), the law (Gal. 4:4) and death (v. 9; Phil. 2:7–8), so our crucifixion with Christ means our release from the realm of sin (this verse), the law (6:14; 7:4), and death

⁹ Ibid, 707.

¹⁰ Max Zerwick and Mary Crosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 471.

¹¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 368.

(8:1–11).¹²

Likewise, Christians have been united in the same resurrection that Christ revived. Some people would be unsure that either sharers of his resurrection or to a resurrection (like his).¹³ “ἐσόμεθα” is future tense. However, as in Romans 5:19, “For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.” The usage of future tense here is logical rather than temporal.¹⁴ The point of Paul's statement in this verse regarding the likeness of his resurrection is to emphasize that Christians have already participated in the resurrection of Christ. In other words, that resurrection of his new life, in which we will “participate” in the future, is working to enable us to “walk in newness of life.”¹⁵

Significantly, Paul stated that Christians are united in the death and resurrection of Christ, which is passive, specific, and transformative. Christians are passive in all this, and it is all the work of God. The union of Christians with Christ is not an abstract concept but a specific redemption event. Paul argues that Christians were united to Christ and participated in his same death and resurrection, which brought about a remarkable transformation of Christians: to die to sin and to live to God in verses 6-10.

Having been united with Christ's death brought Christians' release from the realm of sin

¹² Ibid, 372-373.

¹³ Zerwick and Crosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 471.

¹⁴ Ibid, 471.

¹⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 355.

6:6 τοῦτο γινώσκοντες ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ 6:7 ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας.¹⁶

The translation of verses 6 to 7 is that “we know that our old man was crucified together (with him) so that the sinful body could be abolished and not be a slave to sin anymore; because the dead man has been freed from the claims of sin.”

First, the old self is the earlier, unregenerate person or self, not sinful nature. “ἄνθρωπος” has the meaning that a being in conflict at a transcendent level. First, it could be the two sides of human nature: the outer being and the inner being. The outer being is the human being in their material, transitory, and sinful aspect (2 Cor 4:16); the inner being is the human in their transcendent significance, striving toward God (Ro 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16). Second, there is another viewpoint with the contrast of παλαιὸς (old) and καινὸς (new) in Ro 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9.¹⁷ The usage here is not a conflict between the outer being and the inner being, but old and new. “παλαιὸς” could pertain to that which is obsolete or inferior because of being old, *old*, *obsolete*. Simply, it is an earlier, unregenerate *person or self*.¹⁸ “καινὸς” could pertain to that which is recent in contrast to something old, *new*. It is about what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. It is of the renewing of a person who has been converted

¹⁶ Aland and et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Romans 6:6-7.

¹⁷ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 751.

(Eph 4:24).¹⁹ In short, the “old man” refers to the person or self before his conversion, as contrasted with the converted person. In other words, the old self focuses on “old,” which is unregenerate. “‘Old man’ and ‘new man’ are not, then, ontological, but relational or positional in orientation...Our ‘old man’ is not our Adamic, or sin ‘nature’ ...the ‘old man’ is what we were ‘in Adam’—the ‘man’ of the old age, who lives under the tyranny of sin and death.”²⁰ Christians do not have an old self, yet it can be said that they were once unregenerate.

Second, the old self was crucified with Christ, which means it is over. “Manumission, or freeing slaves, was a very common practice in antiquity; death, of course, ended all obligations (as in 7:2–3).”²¹ However, that is not what Paul meant. “Paul did not believe that by dying people were automatically freed from sin. Instead, he argued that ‘sin reigned in death’ (Rom. 5:21)... for Paul believed that atonement was available only through the death of Christ, not through death in general (Scroggs 1963–64: 105; Fitzmyer 1993c: 437).”²² “συνεσταυρώθη” is that to crucify with, which in a transcendent sense. In other words, it is the extension of identification with Christ’s crucifixion, which means our old self was jointly crucified (Ro 6:6).²³ Again, this verb is the aorist, the passive, which emphasizes Christian’s union with the death of Christ is passive. The old self has been crucified, involving the transformation of the inner

¹⁹ Ibid, 497.

²⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 373-374.

²¹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 435.

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Vol.6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 318-319.

²³ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 978.

humanity and the outer dominion of sin.

On the one hand, the old self has been crucified means that the slavery of submission to sin has been abolished. “τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας” should be translated into “sinful body.” It does not refer to the material human body, but man’s mortal body because it is subject to sin and death.²⁴ “καταργηθῆ” is aorist, passive and subjunctive, which means “has been done away with.” Therefore, Paul argued that the moral body of Christians, previously subject to sin, has been done away with, for they were crucified with Christ.

On the other hand, the old self has been crucified means the Christian has been freed from the power of sin. “ἁμαρτία” is *sin*, which has a destructive evil power. It is regarded as ruling a kingdom, conscripting and paying his armies.²⁵ “δουλεύειν” means to be a slave. “ἀποθανῶν” is a participle, which would favor the substantival usage of the adjective, *dead man*. “δεδικαίωται” to cause someone to be released from personal or institutional claims that are no longer to be considered pertinent or valid, *make free/pure*.²⁶ It is perfect tense and passive, which could be translated as “have been freed.” Christians have been set free from the kingdom of sin into the kingdom of God. “...what he means is the whole nature which we bring from the womb, and which is so incapable of the kingdom of God, that it must so far die as we are renewed to real life.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid, 984.

²⁵ Zerwick and Crosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 472.

²⁶ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 249.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. John Owen (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 224.

Lastly, concerning the interaction with the other epistles of Paul, Paul's command to Christians in Ephesians 4:22-24 to "put off the old man and put on the new man" does not conflict with "our old man has been crucified." On the one hand, Romans 6:6-7 and Colossians 3:9-11 are about Christians no longer being in Adam but in Christ. "Behind the contrast between 'old man' and 'new man' is the contrast between Adam and Christ...these phrases denote the solidarity of people with the 'heads' of the two contrasting ages of salvation history."²⁸ On the other hand, Ephesians 4:22-24 is about the old age still influencing Christians. Here, at the heart of the contrast between "old man" and "new man" is the eschatological tension between the inauguration of the new age in the life of the believer — he or she belongs to the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) — and the culmination of that new age in "glorification with Christ" (8:17). What we *were* "in Adam" is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to *live* in Adam always remains.²⁹ Therefore, Christians do not have an old self, which does not mean Christians do not sin. However, "Indeed, by virtue of Christ's resurrection the age to come has invaded the present evil age, and thus even now believers should walk in newness of life."³⁰

Significantly, Paul argues that the slavery of the sinner, the power of sin, has been destroyed because the old self has died with Christ. "What has been shattered is not the *presence* of sin but the *mastery* of sin over believers."³¹ In other words, unregenerate people are dead in

²⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 374-375.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Vol.6*, 299.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

their sins; union with the death of Christ make Christians no longer dead in sin but be dead toward sin. For sin has no power over those who have died. Therefore, it is a myth that Christians have to overcome the old self.

Christians have been united with Christ's Resurrection brought them life

6:8 εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ συζήσομεν αὐτῷ, 6:9 εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει. 6:10 ὁ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ· ὁ δὲ ζῆ, ζῆ τῷ θεῷ.³²

The translation of Verse 8-10: “now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him, having known that Christ was raised from dead men and never die, death never dominate him. Because which he died, he died to sin once for all; but which he lives, he lives for God.”

First, there is a variant in verse 8, which is either “δὲ” or “γάρ.” Reading 1 is “δὲ,” which means *but, and, now*. Reading 2 is “γάρ,” which means *for, because*. By comparing their external evidence, reading 1 has much evidence, and there are two fourth-century Codexes; reading 2 has an earlier Papyrus at 200.³³ Therefore, reading 2 would have been preferred, though the gap is not significant. In Romans 6:5;6-7;9-10, by comparing their internal evidence, they all have cause clauses. “A few scribes preferred to use γάρ in order to connect the sentence to what goes before.”³⁴ In verse 8, “γάρ” emphasizes the causal relationship between “we have died with

³² Aland and et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Romans 6:7-8.

³³ Barbara Aland and et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament: Apparatus*, Fifth Revi. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: American Bible Society; United Bible Societies, 2014), 516.

³⁴ Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies,

Christ” and “we believe that we will also live with him”. In other words, “γάρ” brings more significance. Thus, the scribes with little possibility would transcribe “γάρ” as “δὲ.” Put together, according to the external evidence that “γάρ” is more favored; considering the internal evidence, “δὲ” is more favored. The chronological gap between the external evidence is not very large, so the conclusion is favored by the internal evidence, which determines reading 1, δὲ.

Second, the union with the death and resurrection of Christ is not a mystical experience or a baptismal experience but an event that has already happened in the history of salvation. On the one hand, in verse 8, “ἀπεθάνομεν” could be of death on a transcendent level. Here, it is the mystical death with Christ.³⁵ Union with Christ is a mystery but not a mystical experience without knowledge. As Gaffin Jr. said:

Union with Christ is a mystery in the New Testament sense of what has been hidden with God in his eternal purposes but now, finally, has been revealed in Christ, particularly in his death and resurrection, and is appropriated by faith (Rom. 16:25–26; Col. 1:26–27; 2:2). Certainly, in its full dimensions this mystery is beyond the believer’s comprehension (Eph. 3:18–19; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9).³⁶

On the other hand, verse 9 points to verse 4 that Christians have been buried together with Christ through baptism. “This is not only a sacramental occurrence, but denotes the participation of believers (by means of the sacrament of baptism) in the redemptive event at Golgotha and in the garden of the resurrection.”³⁷ However, in Romans 6, baptism is not a symbol of the death and

1994), 453.

³⁵ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 111.

³⁶ Richard B. Jr., Gaffin, “Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 273.

³⁷ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, ed. John Trans. Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 207.

resurrection with Christ, as Douglas J. Moo said:

Baptism, rather, functions as shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole. As such, it is the instrument (note the “through” in v. 4) by which we are put into relationship with the death and burial of Christ. It is not, then, that baptism is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ; nor is it that baptism is the place at which we die and rise with Christ. Dying and rising with Christ refers to the participation of the believer in the redemptive events themselves; and the ultimate basis for Paul’s appeal in this chapter is not what happened when we were baptized, but what happened when Christ died and rose again. That death of his to sin is also our death to sin (vv. 2, 6, 9–10); and that resurrection of his to new life, in which we will “participate” in the future (vv. 5b and 8b), is even now working to enable us to “walk in newness of life” (vv. 4b, 11).³⁸

Christians were united with Christ when Christ died and rose, not when Christians were baptized.

Some people interpreted the elements of baptism symbolically:

Baptism is a picture of our identity with Christ. Just as He died, so we die with Him—buried, as it were, in the water. And just as He was raised, so we are raised from the water to a new life in Him. The only hope we have of living in freedom from sin is to die to it. Since we aren’t going to physically die (at least not yet), identifying ourselves with Jesus’ death and resurrection is the key to overcoming the power of sin in our present, fallen state.³⁹

The author misses the point of the verse. The point is “that in Paul *dying, being buried, etc., with Christ* does not have its ultimate ground in the ceremony of incorporation into the Christian church, but rather in already having been included in the historical death and resurrection of Christ himself.”⁴⁰ The union of Christians in the death and resurrection of Christ is an event that has already occurred in the history of redemption.

Lastly, Christians are no longer dead in sin but live for God's sake because Christ never sin and has risen. On the one hand, Christ did not sin, and he did not need to be saved from the

³⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 355.

³⁹ Steven E. Runge, *High Definition Commentary: Romans* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2014), 109.

⁴⁰ Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 59-60.

power of sin; he died to bear the penalty due to sinners for breaking the law. On the other hand, Christ perfectly kept the law, and temporarily placed himself under death in order to break the power of sin. “Paul has already said in 5:21 that ‘sin reigned in death’ if the authority of sin has been shattered by Christ’s death, then it follows that the mastery of death has been ended as well, for death and sin are coregents, and the one cannot rule without the other.”⁴¹ Then, Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of God the Father. In verse 9, “ἐγερθείς” is aorist, participle, and passive, *been raised*. “κυριεύει” means *hold sway over one*.⁴² In verse 10, “ἐφάπαξ” means that taking place once and to the exclusion of any further occurrence, once for all, once and never again.⁴³ The fact that Christ died only once and that he lives forever has a contemporary significance for Christians. “τῷ θεῷ” is dative of advantage,⁴⁴ which indicates the meaning “for the benefit of” or “in the interest of.” Therefore, “ζῆ τῷ θεῷ” would be better translated as “live for God”.

Significantly, Paul proposes that Jesus Christ was raised once and forever for the glory of God the Father. Therefore, death can never dominate him. The resurrection of Christ is permanent, and the life that His resurrection brings to the Christian is permanent, and the Christian is no longer dead in sin but live for the glory of God.

⁴¹ Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Vol.6*, 320.

⁴² Zerwick and Crosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 472.

⁴³ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 417.

⁴⁴ Zerwick and Crosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 472.

Christians are supposed to count themselves identified with Christ by faith

11 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.⁴⁵

The translation of verse 11 is that “Therefore, you shall account yourself, on the one hand, to be dead men to sin; on the other hand, you live to God in Christ Jesus.”

First, there are textual variants in verse 11, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν or Omit. Reading 1 is “ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,” which has one early Papyrus text, about AD 200. Reading 2 is “ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν,” which has one early text in the third century, and the Papyrus text in the fifth century. Reading 3 has no early Greek text support, only translated versions.⁴⁶ The external evidence for Reading 1 is favored. About the internal evidence, the Textus Receptus, following ⱼ C K P 33 81 614 1739c al, adds τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν. The words appear to be a liturgical expansion, derived perhaps from ver. 23. If they were original, there is no good reason can be found why they should have been deleted from such weighty witnesses as reading 1.⁴⁷ In total, both external and internal evidence favor reading 1, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

Second, Christians need to rely on the Holy Spirit to live for God. “ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” can be understood as “with the Holy Spirit.” Paul said in his epistle that *we are in Christ*, or *in the Spirit*, and at others that *Christ*, or *the Spirit*, *is in us*. Indeed, the distinction in Paul’s mind

⁴⁵ Aland and et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Romans 6:11.

⁴⁶ Aland and et al., *The Greek New Testament: Apparatus*, 516.

⁴⁷ Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 453-454.

between the two notions seems to be so small, not to say non-existent, that he explains and, as it were, defines one by the other. Thus, “ἐν” (not without Semitic influence) is practically reduced to the expression of a general notion of association or accompaniment, which would be rendered in English by “with.”⁴⁸ Therefore, “ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” has the meaning of “with the Spirit”. Again, dative of advantage, “ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” could be interpreted as “but live for God with the Spirit”. Paul, in other words, grounds the believer’s present participation in life in the spiritual power of Christ’s resurrection.⁴⁹ “λογίζεσθε” is imperative, which could be as a result of a calculation *evaluate, estimate, look upon as, consider*.⁵⁰

Significantly, Paul commands that Christians should consider themselves according to identification with Christ. “Ancient philosophers often believed that the most fundamental issue was reason, knowledge or understanding...For Paul, this true wisdom is in Christ, and efficacious not by virtue of preconversion human character but because of what Christ has accomplished.”⁵¹ Therefore, Christians must apply the doctrine of union with Christ by faith and walk with the Holy Spirit in their lives for the glory of God.

Theological analysis

First, in Romans 6:5-11, there is a picture of the transformation of the different headships in Covenant. Union with Christ is a covenant language. “...Paul stresses an important similarity

⁴⁸ Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), 39.

⁴⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 366-367.

⁵⁰ Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 597.

⁵¹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 436.

between Adam and Christ—each is a representative person whose action is imputed, or counted, to those whom he represents. But the actions of Adam and Jesus radically differ, as do the consequences of those actions.”⁵² In the beginning, God made a covenant with Adam as the head, originator, and representative of all humans. Adam sinned, and sin entered the world by him, and all those in Adam are dead in sin. “Covenants are communal and generational. So when our first parents revolted against the covenant of works, that rebellion had a debilitating impact on their progeny.”⁵³ Christ is the later Adam, the head and representative of all the elect, with whom God made a New Covenant. Christ did not sin and was crucified and resurrected so that all in him are no longer dead in sin but dead to sin and alive to God.

Second, in Romans 6:5-11, the release of Christians from sin fulfills the Old Testament prophecy of God's salvation for His enslaved people. Since Adam's sin, all humankind has died in sin. God continually prophesies his promise in redemptive history to save his people from their sins. When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, God made the call to Moses to lead them across the Red Sea, which was fulfilled through Christian baptism into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3). When Israel was in the Promised Land, God commanded Israel to set bond-servants free in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:47-55). The prophecy of the prophet Isaiah (61:1) also pointed to the fact that God's anointed servant would bring good news and God's year of favor, which were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Christians are united in the death of

⁵² Guy Prentiss Waters, “Covenant in Paul,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 229.

⁵³ John D. Currid, “Adam and the Beginning of the Covenant of Grace,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 100.

Jesus Christ, and they are no longer slaves of sin.

Further, Christians are united in Christ's resurrection, which fulfilled the promise that God would give a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-28). Israel failed in keeping God's law because their moral bodies were rebellious to God. God's salvation freed His people from the dominion of sin and made them a new creation with a new heart and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In short, Christians were united in Christ's death and resurrection to fulfill God's promise to set His people free from sin and to live for God.

Third, union with Christ is the redemptive work of the Triune God. In Romans 6:5-11, the old self's desperate condition could be inferred from the verses. Relationally, unregenerate people are separated from God under His wrath. Their sinful body is to hate God and His word, yet to love sin. Sovereignly, they cannot stop sinning because they are under the dominion of sin. Therefore, sinners cannot save themselves. The work of salvation belongs to Triune God alone. Union with Christ is essentially relational, from which Christ as Mediator restores the relationship between God and man. The old self was separated from God in Adam; the new man, united with Christ, is adopted by Father in Christ. Union with Christ is transformative. The Holy Spirit abolished the sinful body and gave Christians a new heart with the ability to follow the law of God. The saving union between Christ and the believer is brought about by the Holy Spirit, and this union is initiated, kept, and brought to eschatological fulfillment by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ As Murray said,

⁵⁴ Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 415.

Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured for them in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, all of which they become the actual partakers in the application of redemption, and all that by God's grace they will become in the state of consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ.⁵⁵

Union with Christ is the union of the Father's chosen ones with the death and resurrection of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, which is relational, transformative, and sovereign.

Lastly, Christians are united in Christ's death and resurrection as the foundation of Christian sanctification. "It is only when delivered from the law by the body or death of Christ, and united to Him, that we bring forth fruit unto God. (Rom. 6:8; 7:4–6.)"⁵⁶ Christian sanctification presupposes that the Christian has been freed from the power of sin and has a new heart. In other words, the old self has passed, which is the beginning of Christian sanctification. The sanctification of Christians united with Christ does not begin with their failures but with the victory of Christ. Since Christians are not yet glorified, the fact that they might sin requires that they continually draw strength from their union with Christ by faith to live with the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. In other words, because of the eschatological tension between the "already" and the "not yet", Christians should apply the victory of Christ by faith. Christians have not only a victorious beginning, but a future that will not disappoint. The resurrection of Christ gives Christians the hope that the sanctification of Christians will be complete on the day when Christians will not sin, and they will be perfect as the Father is.

⁵⁵ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 170.

⁵⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol.3* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 227.

Conclusion

In Romans 6:5, Christians are united in the death and resurrection of Christ, which is passive, specific, and transformative. It is God's work and brought a remarkable transformation for Christians. It is no more physical or ontological but forensic or positional.

In Romans 6:6-7, the “old man” refers to the person or self before his conversion. Christians do not have an old self. Instead, the old self has been crucified with Christ, involving the transformation of the inner humanity and the outer dominion of sin. Christians do not have an old self does not mean Christians do not sin. There is an eschatological tension between Romans 6:6-7 and Ephesians 4:22-24 that the inauguration of the new age in the life of the believer and the culmination of that new age in “glorification with Christ.”

In Romans 6:8-10, the union with the death and resurrection of Christ is not a mystical experience or a baptismal experience. It is an event that has already happened in the history of salvation. Death has no more power over the risen Christ and Christians in him; sin has no power over Christians. Christians are no longer dead in sin but live for God's sake.

In Romans 6:11, Christians should identify with the death and resurrection of Christ and turn away from sin in pursuit of holiness. Christians must apply the doctrine of union with Christ by faith and walk with the Holy Spirit in their lives for the glory of God.

Union with Christ is the transformation of the head of the covenant. Christians are united in Christ's death and resurrection, bringing release from sin and a new heart that has fulfilled the Old Testament promises of God to His people. Union with Christ is the redemptive work of the Triune God and the foundation of Christian sanctification.

Applications

First, the faithful preaching of the gospel is most important for churches. A man either died in Adam under the wrath of God, or he has been united with Christ, and there is no middle ground. The only way to salvation is union with Christ through faith. If an elder neglects the congregation's relationship with Christ but tries to improve his relationship with the congregation, this is not pastoral care but running his business. It is blasphemy for a minister to replace Christ.

Further, the pulpit should hold the death and resurrection of Christ, the core of the Gospel, as the basis of the sermon on the Christian life. Suppose the pulpit ignores what Christ has already done for His people. In this case, the congregation may move toward legalism, which only increases pride but is powerless to overcome temptation. In other words, sanctification should follow the Gospel. Preaching also requires doctrinal clarity regarding the condition of the Christian. Good doctrinal preaching removes myths. Faith requires knowledge, and Christians need knowledge of the Scriptures. For example, Christians' misunderstanding of the "old self" has led to asceticism and antinomianism in many churches. Christian blindness comes from the pulpit. Therefore, the pulpit should be faithful to the Gospel, Christ-centered, and doctrinally rich, not just empty slogans.

Second, Christian sanctification has a triumphant beginning. Christians have been freed from the kingdom of sin and have a new heart because of their union with Christ so that Christians can live a holy life, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to obey the Word of God with the goal of God's glory. Therefore, Christians have no excuse to stay in sin.

From a negative perspective, if a Christian is addicted to a specific sin, it is his choice to obey the lusts of the flesh instead of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they have been set free but abuse that freedom to return to sin. It is foolish and ungrateful for Christians to remain unrepentant. “Believers have no place living as those who do not know the Lord. To live in that way is to disgrace Christ who loved us and gave himself for us.”⁵⁷ Regarding fighting ingratitude, Christians should preach the gospel to themselves to remind them that the death and resurrection of Christ were to save them from their sins and not to make them live in sin in obedience to the lusts of the flesh. Nor could a Christian practice asceticism or mysticism. A Christian's sanctification should be based on what Christ has done, and not on himself. The freedom that Christians already have in Christ cannot be an excuse for laziness or indulgence. Considering the eschatological tension, Christians should avoid temptation and overcome the flesh through the Holy Spirit daily.

From a positive perspective, the doctrine of union with Christ is the remedy for Christians with unrepentant sins. Christians who trapped in sin need to lift their heads and look to the risen Christ to consider that they are not in despair but in the triumph of Christ. Just as Christ's death and resurrection are actual, the Christian's freedom from sin and having a new heart are absolute. Therefore, a Christian trapped in sin needs to constantly identify himself with Christ, remember his transformation in nature, relationship, and sovereignty, and exercise his freedom from sin in obedience to the Holy Spirit, which he received from the death and

⁵⁷ Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ*, 400.

resurrection of Christ. If a Christian does not recognize the work of salvation that is taking place in his life, he is easily deceived by lies. Faith requires the Word of God. “The same Word is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain.”⁵⁸ Therefore, Christian sanctification is not only turning away from sin but also pursuing the Word of God. In other words, Stable Bible reading is necessary to have a solid Christian life.

Lastly, the resurrection of Christ brings living hope to the Christians. When the trumpet is blown, Christians will have complete victory over sin and death and rest in God's presence, which comforts them in the battle against sin.

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tran. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 549.

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