

Romans

#14: United

Romans 6:1-14

Dr. Jeremiah Ebeling ---- November 16, 2025

Good morning, Grace. It's so good to worship with you. Thank you, band, for leading us in worship.

There is a distinctive of the Christian faith that is unique among every other worldview or perspective or world religion. And it's this: that salvation is received, not achieved; that salvation comes to us as a gift that's given to us, not because of a work that we've performed or because we have earned it as some kind of wage. Salvation is a gift given to us. And it's not because of any goodness that is in us. It's one hundred percent received, not achieved.

And once you understand that, once you really grasp that truth, that reality, and you buy it, and you start living like it's true, a question can often come up. And it's a natural question. And that question is this: if salvation is true and received, not achieved, then once you're saved, can't you just do anything you want? Can't you live however you want to now? I mean, if God has given you a grace credit card and He's already paid for anything that you would charge to it, why not run up the bill? God loves to be generous; how about giving Him more opportunity to be generous?

Romans 6:1

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Well, that's a question that the Apostle Paul poses in Romans 6:1. He asks this: "**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?**" Should we go on sinning, that we might give God more opportunity to show us grace?

In many respects, it's a logical question. It means that you really understand the nature of salvation. You totally get God's grace and what it means. And it's a question that I imagine the Apostle Paul was probably asked dozens of times in his ministry.

And yet, it's also kind of a dumb question, isn't it? Or, as my elementary teacher would say, "There are no dumb questions, just dumb people." He always seemed to be looking at me when he said that, too.

The Apostle responds immediately in verse 2 and says, "**By no means are we to go on sinning that grace might increase.**" He says, *No, that would be foolish, that would be dumb to think that way as a Christian.*

And the reason is because there is a theme in the gospel that gives us every reason, every motivation, that we might need to stop sinning, to change, to want to change, to choose to change. This theme is stated in a single profound word in the verses that we're going to be looking at today. And I want you to see what that word is.

What we're going to do in our passage today in Romans 6 is tackle these first fourteen verses in this chapter—not in a sequential order. We're going to tackle it in a logical or thought order in which Paul is thinking as he writes. And so, we're going to be jumping around a little bit. So, I wanted you to be aware of that in advance.

The Life-Changing Reality

What I want you to do is open up your Romans journals or your Bible to Romans 6:5. I want you to see that thing—what is that word, that life-changing reality, that gives us every motivation that we could possibly need as Christians. Here it is. It's going to be on the screen.

Romans 6:5

For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.

Verse 5, Paul says, "**For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.**"

And there's the word: united. We've been united with Him in a death like His, and we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. That's the word. That's that life-changing reality that motivates us to change, to not stay who we are when we became believers.

And according to Romans 6:5 the reality is that all the motivation and desire and reason to change is in this word and what it means—this profound word, that we have been united with the divine. We're united with Christ.

And what's fascinating about this word is that it's actually a gardening word that Paul uses here for this word "united." It's from the field of horticulture. What he does is that he gives us this word from an area that you might know—or at least some of us might know—to help us understand this deeper spiritual truth. I consider myself somewhat of an expert in gardening. Because, you know, over the years I've planted dozens of bushes and plants and flowers that have almost all died. They've been planted, neglected, and I watched as they died a slow, sad death.

Regardless, I'm going to help you understand what Paul means with this word "united." What does it mean in gardening and what does it mean for our spiritual life?

Here's what Paul is doing for us. *[Draws a plant with stem, leaves and roots.]* He wants us to picture this plant. It's green, it's growing, it's got vitality. It has these roots that are growing out of it. (I was called "little Michaelangelo" in elementary school. You can see why.)

In Romans 11, in five chapters, Paul will say that as Gentiles, which is most of you and me, we've been grafted into the stalk alongside the Jewish people. That's not the word that he uses here. It's a different word.

In John 15, Jesus will talk about abiding in Him. He calls us branches. It says, **"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in Him, He will bear much fruit."** That word for branches is not the word that Paul is using here.

Paul says we are united with Christ. And what he means by that is that we are joined together with Christ at His roots. It means that we've been inserted into the very roots of Jesus' life. Our life has been connected, conjoined, with Christ's life at the deepest, most fundamental level; that we couldn't be any more connected to Christ than we are, because we're united with Him.

Here's another way to speak of the strength, the depth, of the union that we have with Jesus Christ: "Two become one." Where else is that used in Scripture? What relationship is that used of? It's used for marriage. Two become one: a man and a woman covenant with the Lord and with each other to be united, to become one together. And they become united in every respect. And later in another book, Paul used that as this imperfect image of what we have in

Christ—this union, this fact, this idea, this truth, that we’re united with Christ. We become one with Christ. We are united with Him at His very roots.

So, what Paul is saying with this gardening word is he’s speaking to this incredible connection, this joining together of us at the roots with Christ. And then he shares two results of that union with Him.

The Results: We Died with Him

Romans 6:5-7

For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.

The first result is that he says that we died with Him. We died with Him. Look at verse 5: **“For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly”** (assuredly) **“be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self”**—we died with Him—**“was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For the one who has died has been set free from sin.”**

He says that we’ve died with Christ. What he’s saying that Christ’s past is our past. When Jesus looks at you as a believer, when the Lord God looks at you as a believer, He considers you to have been on that cross with Christ. You were laid for those three days in that cold, dark tomb. His past was your past.

It was a crowded cross.

It was a crowded tomb.

Because that’s how God sees us. And when we were united with Christ, He didn’t ask us to sign a prenup before the relationship started, before we got in it. He wasn’t holding anything back. Everything that was Christ’s becomes ours forever. That’s what happens in salvation.

And the fact that we're united with Him and died with Him in that way totally changes our relationship to sin. It totally changes our relationship to sin. And again, you look at it here. Because he says that our old self was crucified with Him. Our old self is who we were before we came to Christ. It was crucified with Him. God sees us as having died with Him. And what does that mean for the body of sin? Well, the "body of sin" is another way to say, not that our bodies are inherently evil; it's just that our bodies are ruled by sin. They've come to nothing. They've been brought to nothing. Why? That we may no longer be enslaved to sin; so that we would be set free from sin. And so, our relationship to sin has totally changed because of what Christ has done for us.

That's the first result—that we died with Him.

The Results: We Will Be Resurrected As He Was

Romans 6:5, 8-10

For is we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His ...⁸ Now is we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.¹⁰ for the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.

The second result is that we will be resurrected as He was. Look at our next passage. We'll be resurrected as He was. **"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."** Verse 8: **"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God."**

His past is now our past. His future in our future. We will be resurrected as He was.

And so, in His crucifixion, Jesus defeated sin. And in His resurrection, He defeats death. He breaks the power of death over us. So, as a believer, when this body gives out—sure, we'll all die. But the believer only dies once. There is no second death for the believer. There is no

spiritual death like Revelation talks about for those who don't have faith in Christ. No, there's just the one death. And even that death is very temporary, right? It's only for a short time, because death won't be able to hold us down. Because Jesus' future is our future.

So, we will enjoy a resurrection like His. We will live with Him forever. That's the second result, that we'll be resurrected as He was.

Baptism: A Picture of This Spiritual Reality

And then what Paul does is give us a picture of this spiritual reality that we're united with Christ.

Romans 6:2-4

How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

And he does that in verses 2 through 4. And this is what he says. Listen for it. He says, **“How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”**

So, what's the picture? What's the word? Baptism, right? He says it three times. Baptism is that picture of our unity with Christ. And the reason—why is that? Why is baptism that picture? Because baptism is this physical display of this metaphysical reality that we're united with Christ at the very roots of His life. It's this tangible expression of this eternal reality, this eternal unity that we get to share and enjoy with Him.

Because, you see, the way God works is so often for the deepest spiritual truths. What He does is that He gives us some tactile ways to experience with our bodies, our souls, and our spirits—every part of us—and also remember the spiritual reality. So, that's what He does with

baptism. It's this picture of the unity that we have. It's this public demonstration that we were with Christ in His death, that we were buried with Him, that we will be raised with Him. That's the purpose of that picture.

So, if you want to understand who we baptize at Grace Covenant Church, it's Christians. It's those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We practice what we call believers' baptism here at Grace. So, we baptize children and youth and adults who profess faith in Christ. It's faith first and baptism second, in that order. And they're supposed to be together. But baptism is this external demonstration of an internal faith. That's what it is—but faith comes first. And so, we don't baptize infants here at Grace. And the reason is because an infant hasn't had a chance to put their faith in Christ. We dedicate infants. We say that we're going to come alongside those caretakers, those guardians, those parents, and we're going to help disciple this little one that they might grow up and put their faith in Christ. And then we'll baptize them when they're ready to do that. That's when we want to do it. So, that's who we baptize.

How do we baptize? How is that we go about doing baptisms at Grace? Well, the way to understand how we've gotten to what we do is to look at the meaning of this word "baptism." It means "immersion." It means to submerge entirely. This word "baptism" was used outside Scripture in extrabiblical literature, in Greek literature, to talk about a ship that has sunk to the bottom of the ocean. It's used for a person who has drowned. It means to be totally submerged.

And so, we don't sprinkle or pour water on someone when we baptize them. No, we bring them under the water, completely submerged, and then bring them up. And we do that because we're just trying to the best of our ability to do what the text says, to obey what it means. So, that's why we immerse. That's why we fully submerge, because we're trying to obey what the text says.

Is baptism necessary for salvation? Is it a requirement to be saved? Of course not. I mean, if you read the first five chapters of Romans and you read Paul's argument, what he is saying over and over again in many different ways, he's saying that it's faith alone. It's faith alone. Salvation is received, not achieved. He's not saying now that it's faith alone with this other little thing that you've got to do. That's not his argument. There are a number of places in Scripture you can go to in order to understand that baptism isn't necessary for salvation. But just look at Paul's argument in Romans, and that's all you need to understand—that no, it's not necessary.

However ... baptism is not any more a requirement for salvation than a wedding ring is for a man in a marriage. You don't have to have a wedding ring on to be married. But as a married man, if I didn't wear my ring ever, people might be confused by that, right? They may have some questions about it. And first in line would be my wife. *Is there something you're trying to tell me, Jeremiah? Put that ring on your finger.*

So, like a wedding ring to a marriage, baptism is a sign, a symbol, of salvation. It's an ordinance. It's even a command. We're told to be baptized. Go and baptize others. And it's instituted by God, and it's this way for us to proclaim and to tell others, and for others to witness this spiritual reality that we're united with Christ at His very roots; that that is true about us now and forever. Just like the first time somebody puts on a wedding ring, that's supposed to be a part of you. It's supposed to be a celebration. Why? Because it's somebody who is now walking in newness of life. Man, you celebrate that. That's awesome, and we love to do that at Grace.

But I wonder, as you read the passage and you hear what I've just shared about our view of baptism, are you a believer? Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ? If you're a Christian and you're not baptized, is something just keeping you from taking that step of obedience. Something is keeping you from taking that next step, making that next move that Jesus has invited you into, this party, this celebration, that we're supposed to be enjoying together. I wonder if you think about that and think, *You know, it's been too long since I received Christ.* Or you're a ministry leader here and you wonder what those whom you serve and lead would think if you were to be baptized now. *I became a Christian thirty years ago. That would just be weird. They might lose respect for me.* If that's where you are and this topic of baptism has become a source of embarrassment for you—the idea of being baptized—I'd just like to say to you, *Isn't that what the enemy would love to do? Isn't that what the enemy does?* He takes this opportunity that God gives us to obey Him, to celebrate new life in Christ, this opportunity to put on this spiritual wedding ring, and he twists it. He distorts it. And he makes it this source of embarrassment or shame in our lives.

If that's where you are, can I just encourage you, however long it's been—six months, thirty years—however long it's been—would you consider not letting the enemy win in that way, if that's the game he's playing with you? We'd love to have you be a part of baptism here at Grace Covenant Church.

In fact, in two weeks on November 30th we're going to have one service at Grace. We're bringing all of Grace together for one service at 10:00 am. And we're going to have baptisms that day. We're going to baptize some men and women and some children who have professed their faith in Christ. And I tell you, if that's where you are, would you consider being a part of that with us—being baptized at that service? You can go to our website. The link is up there. And you can apply to be baptized. It's a bit of a process. It's two weeks away and we've got Thanksgiving in there. I encourage you to do that now—today, or in the next forty-eight hours. But we'd love to do that with you to celebrate that with you.

And if it's not in two weeks, then in the spring or early summer we'll have baptisms again. We could do something a little more intimate with friends and family and neighbors. We do that too here at Grace. We'd love to help you take that step of obedience to put on that spiritual wedding ring that says, *I've got a new life in Christ. We're united with Jesus Himself at the very roots.* We'd like to help you be able to do that.

So, we're united with Christ. We died with Him and we'll be resurrected as He was. The picture of that is baptism, this public expression of this internal reality. And then, there's another thing that Paul says. He applies the idea of being united with Christ, this union with Christ, not just with our past, not just with our future, but also to our present.

The Choice

And he says that there's a choice to make. He says that we all have a choice to make. And that choice, he says, is to not let sin reign.

Romans 6:11-14

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore **reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no **dominion** over you, since you are not under the law but under grace.**

Look at the passage here in verse 11: **“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make it obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”**

There are two key words in this passage. The first one is this—it’s the word “reign.” That word “reign” means to be king. Paul is saying, *Don’t let sin be your king. Don’t let it reign over you. You’re a believer now.* There’s another synonymous word that’s very similar, and that’s the word “dominion.” That’s the word for “lord,” as in the Lord Jesus Christ, but with a little “1.”

What Paul is saying is to not let sin have dominion over you. Don’t let it be your lord. Now you’re a believer, you’re united with Christ at His very roots. And what Paul is doing here is painting this picture of two kingdoms. He says there’s an old kingdom, and that’s where we all live as nonbelievers before we knew Christ, before we had a relationship with Him. And in that old kingdom sin reigns. It’s in charge. It’s our lord, and we do what we’re told. It kicks us around.

There’s this new kingdom where we live now as a believer. And in that kingdom Jesus reigns. He is Lord. He has dominion over your life. And you get to enjoy all the freedom that comes with that.

What’s interesting is that Paul shows that as a believer you can live in this new kingdom and yet act like you’re still in the old one. He says that you can be in this new kingdom where you’re united with Christ at His roots, where you’ve died with Him and will be resurrected as He was. And yet, you allow sin to rule you still. You’re cuffed and being led around by some sin in your life. He said that you can choose to live that way in this new kingdom. And there are Christians all over the place that made this choice.

I’ve made that choice. I mean, I think about my life as a believer—pride, anger, lust, envy, greed. They’ve all been my lord in this new kingdom. I think I just named most of the seven deadly sins. I’ve had periods of that too, even long periods. But Paul says, *No, choose, make a choice. Don’t let sin reign in you any longer. That’s the old kingdom. That’s the old you. Don’t do that.*

How do we get there? How do we get to this place in the new kingdom where we're letting sin be lord over us? Well, he tells us that too. Verse 12: **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make it obey its passions.”**

He says that the way you let sin reign again, the way that you let it have dominion in your life again, is by obeying your passions.

Let me tell you what that word means. In Greek that word for “passion” is the word *epithumia*. *Thumia*, a shortened version of that word, means “desires”—good desires, healthy desires. But that word “passions”—it’s not just *thumia*. It’s *epithumia*. *Epi-* means “over,” so it’s an over-desire. So, with *epithumia* we’ve moved from these good, healthy, natural desires to cravings. We’ve moved from “I like this” or “I desire this” to “I must have this.” We obey the passions, the *epithumias*, these over-desires. Paul says that’s how we end up there in this place where sin is reigning and it’s our lord.

So, it could be these desires for bad things, these things we know will hurt us—sure. But it can also be these *epi*-desires for good things. It’s not this normal, God-given desire; it’s this over-desire, this *epi*-desire, for good things, where we take something that’s good and make it the ultimate. We look at that ultimate thing now to give us security and significance, these things that only Jesus can truly give us in any kind of meaningful way.

So, when we have an eating disorder, what we’ve done with that is we’ve taken these good desires, these *thumias* for being physically fit or attractive or in shape, and we’ve turned them into *epi*-desires, these cravings for something we must have. And that’s how you end up there.

Or it’s when we overwork and we won’t leave the office or we won’t close our laptop at home. We’re always on. We’ve moved from this good desire for the benefits that work truly brings and is meant to bring to these *epi*-desires, these over-desires for those things, whatever it may be—money or achievement or identity. We’ve made that transition from a desire to a craving. “I must have this.”

So, how do you know when a good desire has turned into this *epi*-desire, when a good thing has become ultimate in your life? Well, Tim Keller has several really helpful things to say about this passage. But one the most helpful, I think, is this: watch your emotions. He says to watch your emotions. He says there are three emotions that will show you, that are kind of telltale signs, that you have moved from a *thumia*, a healthy desire, to an *epi*-desire, an *epithumia*. There are three emotions.

And the first one is anger. When somebody blocks something that is a good thing, something that you want or desire, sure, you get frustrated. Maybe you even get angry. But if someone blocks you from getting an ultimate thing, it's not just anger you experience, it's anger plus. You become enraged. You yell, you scream, or you simmer in bitterness. There's a chance that if any of us are stuck in unforgiveness to somebody right now or in times past, what has happened is that we've had an *epi*-desire, this thing that was good that we made ultimate, and someone stopped us from getting it. It was blocked. And we won't forgive them. That's the first emotion that can show that a desire has turned into an *epi*-desire.

The second emotion is fear. When something in your life is threatened, sure, you're fearful, you're worried. But if something ultimate in your life is threatened, if it might be taken away, what happens is that you're paralyzed by fear. It's not just fear, it's fear plus. You're paralyzed by fear, you can't think straight, you're filled with anxiety. It's an *epi*-desire that's controlling us when that happens.

There's a third emotion. He says it's sadness. When you lose something that is good, sure, you're going to hurt over it, you're going to grieve that loss. It takes time to get over it. But with something that you *epi*-desire, that sadness becomes sadness plus. It's hard to get out of bed in the morning. Maybe you're hopeless. You're devastated. Because it's gone from a desire to an *epi*-desire.

So, these elevated versions of these emotions in our lives can show us, can help us to pinpoint where these passions, these *epithumias*, are running the show in my life and allowing sin to be my lord and reign over me.

Because what Paul is saying is, *Look, every Christian has a choice to make.* We can be in this new kingdom but act like we still live in the old one where we're led around by some sin, by some *epi*-desire, and it tells us what to do and where to go and when to do it. And we say, "Yes, sir" and "Yes ma'am."

Or we live in this new kingdom where we are united with Christ at His very roots. We enjoy being part of His past. Our past is His past, our future His future, our present His present. And we enjoy Jesus reigning and being Lord, because He is a kind and gracious and compassionate, trustworthy Lord and King in our lives. But what Paul is saying is that there is great power in the reality. And as Christians, we have a choice. We can choose which of those we are going to be, choose what that new kingdom experience is like. We get to choose.

The great St. Augustine made his choice. St. Augustine lived 1,600 years ago, but he wasn't always a saint. He was well known before he became a believer for his promiscuous lifestyle. Even after he became a believer, in those early years, his prayer to the Lord was, "Lord, give me chastity...but not yet!" Maybe in just a little bit ... I've got some things to do first.

But as Augustine's faith grew and God changed his heart, changed his life and his perspective, he realized that he was united with Christ at his roots. His heart changed, and he went from using people for his pleasure to loving and serving them.

And the story goes that one day Augustine was in one of the towns he had lived in before, and as he was walking down the street one of his former mistresses saw him and called out to him, "Augustine! It's me!"

Augustine turns around and sees her. He responds, "Yes, but it's no longer me."

You see, Augustine knew that he was now St. Augustine. The old Augustine was gone. Sin was no longer his lord.

So, whatever those sins are for you, whatever those *epi*-desires might be for you, like St. Augustine, you can say to them, "Yes, but it's no longer me. I am not who I was. I am now united with Christ at the roots, the very roots of His life."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Let's ask that He would help us as we make that choice, even today.

Dear Lord, what an amazing truth this is, that we are invited with You to be a part of Your life and the way that You've invited us in; that we are united, and we couldn't be any closer or any more connected to You than we are. Lord, You have drawn us close to You in such a way that our past is joined with Yours, our present, our future, all three.

Lord, I pray that as we consider our choice, the choice we have to make, would You help us be able to choose to keep You, to consider ourselves what we are, what You've already made us to be—dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus; that we might keep You, Lord, and allow You to reign, because You've earned it. We pray that in Your Son's name. Amen.