

Alive in Christ

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going back this morning to look at Romans chapter 6. We see that Romans is really a textbook that focuses on the gospel, that focuses on how important it is and how much we need Jesus Christ.

And I really love this section. This is a brilliant section of Romans that really focuses on Jesus Christ and what it is to be a Christian.

He keeps going back, Paul keeps going back to, and I'm using one of Thomas's really significant big new words that he used last week when he preached.

This great technical term that he used, bigness. The bigness of the gospel, that's what he spoke of, and that's what is tremendously important here in this section, what it means to be a Christian.

And the challenge when we come together, the challenge for us in our day-to-day, mundane, ordinary Christian lives is very much to recognize what it is that we have and what we possess so often for us, and I confess my guilt in this, that Jesus is a small part of my life and that Christ can be insignificant to us, a segment of our lives, kind of a relevant day-to-day in many ways, sometimes for us.

[1 : 25] And I want to challenge that today. I also want to challenge you if you're an unbeliever and maybe visiting with us today, and it's brilliant to have you here if that's the case.

You may be wrestling with who you are as a person and why you're here, not here, or maybe why you're here, maybe you've been dragged along, but why you're here on this world, why you exist and what it means to be part of this world.

And I hope that we will be able to grasp the wonderful truth that is here. It's a bit like driving, you know, if you've been driving a car for a long time and you forget what it's like to learn to drive and you forget what it's like to find the biting point on the clutch.

Now, our American friends would know what I'm meaning here because they all drive automatics, but when in the old days when you used to drive stick shifts, when you used to have a gear stick like most normal drivers have in the UK, then you remember that one of the most difficult things is finding the biting point in the clutch so that you're not lurching forward or you're not stalling and stopping.

So they actually smoothly move forward and are able to drive confidently. When you get the biting point, when you have confidence in that movement when you're driving, then it makes such a difference.

[2 : 46] These plates come together and the car moves forward smoothly. Well, in many ways, this is like a biting point. When we get this, when we get what Paul is saying here and what the gospel is really, the code of the gospel, it enables us to move forward much more smoothly in our Christian lives as we recognize who he is and what the gospel is.

Because Paul is here wrestling with the danger of not understanding the gospel properly. He said, that's crazy. How can you not understand the gospel? The gospel is absolutely simple.

It's basic. It's clear. The Bible makes clear what it is. I understand that. Please don't give me another simple, basic gospel message because I understand. I've moved beyond that.

Well, Paul makes clear and God makes clear through Paul that it's easy for us long time Christians or short time Christians or not Christians to misunderstand what the gospel is.

So I'm going to say two things from this chapter. The danger of believing what the gospel is not. And also the danger of not believing what the gospel is.

[3 : 59] Slight difference. I hope that we'll unpack that a little bit and it will not be too confusing. Believing what the gospel is not. You see, Paul in the previous section and Thomas was dealing with this superbly last week, he was explaining grace and Paul is explaining grace in the previous chapter, verse 18 of chapter 5.

One man's trespass led to condemnation for all men. One act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. So there's this great sense in which Paul is pointing to Jesus Christ and what he has done and that God is saying through one person, through Jesus Christ alone, it's the only way that we can be made right with God.

It's nothing to do with our own goodness. It's nothing to do with our own efforts. Paul is radically and powerfully saying it's all about what Jesus has done.

We get His righteousness. He takes our sin. And it's that old truth of the gospel, isn't it, that we know?

We trust and we believe, at least in our heads, that all our sins as Christians, our past sins, our sins today, our future sins that we haven't even committed yet, they've all been covered.

[5 : 18] They've all been dealt with. They are all forgiven in Christ. You can, as a believer, do anything to make yourself better or more righteous or more pleasing and right to God, because Jesus has done it.

We are covered in what He has done. You can't be loved more by Him. He loves you today. He loves you when you've failed. He loves you when you've done great things.

His love for us doesn't change. We can never be more accepted. It's a gift. Salvation is a gift. We recognize that, don't we? We see that there's nothing we can do, our church going, our Bible attendance, our morality.

Nothing adds to what Jesus achieved when we trust in Him. But that is risky truth, isn't it? It is risky truth for us.

And Paul and God, through Paul, anticipates that kind of risky teaching by bringing out a misunderstanding, either that he's heard in the church in Corinth or he's anticipating might be as a result of what he is teaching, because we recognize in verse 20 of chapter 5 that he says, the law came in to increase the trespass.

[6 : 41] So were sin increased, grace abounded all the more. And because of that, he anticipates a misunderstanding about that truth that people might be asking, oh well, let's continue in sin so that grace may abound.

And he sees that as a misunderstanding of the gospel. Let's sin more, because if we sin more, then we'll be more forgiven. And it'll be more glorifying to God, because more grace will be revealed.

If we haven't faced that kind of thinking ourselves, or other people have challenged us with that thinking when we presented the gospel, it's probably because we've never presented the gospel.

That is the risk of the gospel. People will come up with this misunderstanding that it doesn't matter then how we live, because God's forgiven it anyway. We can live anyway.

Once saved, always saved. It doesn't matter if we sin, because all we need to do is live this way and go to God at the end of the week and ask Him for forgiveness, and Jesus has paid the price.

[7 : 53] That's the meaning of verse 20, isn't it? Right? Let's sin all the more so that grace can abound. Isn't that right? Can't we live like that in our lives? Well Paul speaks into that, and God through Paul speaks into it.

And this is a challenge. It doesn't matter how you live. Sin is unimportant as Christians. It's okay, because Jesus is forgiving it all anyway, and I believe.

What does God say through Paul? He says, by no means. He says, may it never be.

It's really strong language. In fact, it's so strong that the authorized version, the old version of the Bible, gave us a paraphrase there and said, God forbid.

God forbid, it was really strong. May it never be. That cannot be the case. It's not right that we ever think it doesn't matter how we live, and that we can sin and keep on doing wrong things so that grace and forgiveness may abound.

[8 : 57] May it never be. It's a misunderstanding of who we have become, and what was achieved for us on the cross, as well as not realizing the seriousness and the destructiveness of sin.

So I want to spend just a moment here talking about sin, because it's very important in this section that we understand why Paul is making, why God through Paul is making such a big deal, why the Holy Spirit is making such a big deal, of this really significant gospel truth.

And so we're going to look at sin for a minute, and the word that's used here is a word we've looked at before, or the meaning behind it is one we've looked at before. It's about not hitting the target.

Sin is here described as falling short of the target, being separated from the target. So God asks us to live perfect lives, loving Him perfectly, loving one another perfectly.

We fall short of that. It's like an arrow that is shot, but it doesn't hit the target, and it's lying on the ground, separated from what it's meant to be hitting.

[10 : 09] Like a bullet that's spent lying on the ground that hasn't met its target and isn't where it should be. And that's the picture, the word picture of sin here.

We are lawbreakers. When we think of lawbreaking, we think of rules to disobey, of broken rules that I shouldn't have broken. But there's a layer deeper than that in the gospel because it's actually the breaking of the trust and the love that is behind the commandments, for example, God's commandments, which are commandments of love.

Jesus summarizes them as loving God perfectly and loving your neighbor. Sin replaces that and distorts that love by taking God out of the equation, separating God out so he's not part of the life that they live.

We love ourselves, we enthrone ourselves, and we only love other people as it suits us. So sin is ditching the idea that there's someone greater than us, someone holy, someone perfect, someone that we are accountable to, someone that we can't understand ordinarily, and that sin separates us from Him, the author of life and of all goodness.

Now I think it's easy for us today to have sanitized and justified and caricatured and popularized and diminished and minimized sin. We don't like the word, we don't like the concept.

[11 : 42] But I think separation is a good picture today. It helps us. You know, if you're in a fire and the fire is burning at the escape route, you're separated from the way of escape, that's a terrible thing.

Or if you're in a huge city late at night as a child and you're separated from your parents and you don't know how to find them, that's a terrible thing.

It's a frightening thing to be lost and alone as darkness falls, or much more sadly when you stand at the graveside of your wife, or of your husband, or of your daughter, or of your sister, or of your best friend, and you're separated from them in the most final way.

And you know that, don't you? You recognize that that's a desperate separation. That's what sin is, it's this lot breaking separating us ultimately from God because we don't love Him as we should.

He is holy and we are disunited from Him and death separation from Him is the result of that.

[12 : 54] Christ alone bridges that gap, doesn't He? Christ alone bridges that gap between ourselves and God. Now there's a related misunderstanding here and I'm wondering a little bit, but it's still very, I think important in the whole idea of understanding sin.

We might not say, well God will forgive me because He's already paid the price, but we might just say, well God will forgive me if I do my best and I'm as good as anyone else.

Because we misunderstand the word, the concept, the reality of sin. I'll just do my best, I'll try my hardest. Now all I want to do is give a quick illustration of why this is a dangerous thinking.

Mike Powell, I don't know if any of you have heard of Mike Powell, he's the world record holder long jump of long jump. He broke the world record a long time ago in 1991.

He's held that record for a long time and his world record long jump is 29 feet, four inches and a quarter. That's a long way to jump, that's nearly nine meters.

[13 : 57] He's the very best long jumper in the world. He is the best at what he does. There's no one better than Mike Powell. But if I were to take Mike Powell to the shortest point, the narrowest point of between two sides of the Grand Canyon and ask him to jump, he would fall desperately short because at its shortest the Grand Canyon is 600 feet apart.

At its widest it's 18 miles, but at its narrowest it's 600 feet. His 29 feet, four inches and a quarter kind of falls in significance, doesn't it?

He's not going to make it to the other side. It doesn't matter that he comparatively is the best jumper in the whole world. He isn't anywhere near bridging the gap of the Grand Canyon. And the same is true of us comparatively.

We might be the best person in the whole world compared with everyone else. It might be the most moral and the most upright. But compared with ourselves and God, the gap is just enormous.

And we fall short. We fall short of His standard. That's what sin is being spoken of here. And it's vital to realize as Christians that we don't go on sinning.

[15 : 17] Because going on sinning, that is always having this attitude that it doesn't matter. It reminds us that we're being separated from the author of life and of love.

So we mustn't believe what it is not. And Paul addresses that here. He says, you know, well, let's continue and sin. So that graces me about. It doesn't matter how you live. You can go from here and live any way you want.

Just come back and have a prayer just before you come into church on a Sunday morning and God will forgive you everything. That's what he's saying. Don't believe that because it's a misrepresentation of the gospel.

So the danger, secondly, the other thing I want to say is not believing what it is. What is the gospel? We must, it's so important for us. It's so precious and valuable. And I hope, encouraging for us to know what it is to believe in Jesus Christ.

He says, do you not know? Well, verse two, by no means. And then he goes on to say, how can we who died to sin still live in it?

[16 : 17] And he goes on to speak about being baptized with Christ into His death and into His resurrection. So what he's saying? He's saying we've died to sin. So he's nailing this particular misunderstanding and saying, no, you have died to sin.

Really? Is that what he's saying? Do you believe that? Do I believe that? What's he saying? Does that mean I'm now perfect? That I never sin? Well, if someone takes a cup of coffee at the end of the service and actually does, he spills it all over you, we'll find out how many of us are still sinners.

But we recognize that that is not what he means. He doesn't mean that we're not going to sin anymore. He doesn't mean that we are now perfect because we are dead to sin.

That's not your experience. That's not my experience. That's not the teaching of the Bible. We know we battle and wrestle with sin every day. But from God's perspective, he's saying, when you come to Jesus Christ and you're a believer and you follow Him, from God's perspective, there's been a seismic shift.

There's been a huge change in the way God looks at you. And what he's saying is that something real, God the Father saying something real happened at Calvary.

[17 : 33] By faith, we believe that our old self was crucified with Jesus on the cross. That means our sin, as we said at the beginning, was dealt with 2,000 years ago.

Our sin, past, present and future, has been punished on Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God. And as we trust in Him, as we believe that, as we look to Jesus Christ for salvation, then the separation comes to an end.

The gap has been bridged, not by Mike Powell, not by me or by anyone else, but by Jesus Christ who bridged the grand canyon of our sin by His perfect life and met God's standard and yet paid the price for our sin so that we are no longer separated.

We have moved, therefore, what the passage is from death to life. We are in a different kingdom as Christians, with a different King. We're no longer, it says, under the reign of sin.

That is, with darkness and Satan as the King of that kingdom and death as the outcome. He said, we've moved, we died on that day, we died to sin as believers.

[19 : 01] Therefore, what is He saying? What is He saying? He's saying, therefore, that it's impossible, therefore, as Christians, to live a lifestyle that's separated from God again.

In other words, to live as if we are not Christians. To live as if we haven't moved from darkness to life, from death to life. We've changed.

We've been united with Christ, as I'll go on to say. So we can't live as Christians and have no thoughts of God and have no relationship with God and where the love of God doesn't matter to us, where we just live any old way as if we're dead to Christ.

So what He's saying is that something amazing happened at Calvary and it symbolized in what baptism symbolizes in verses 3 and 4.

He talks about, you were baptized with Christ into His death, you were buried with Him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we might walk in unison of life.

[20 : 07] So baptism is just as the Lord's Supper speaks to the death and resurrection of Christ. So does baptism speak of the death and resurrection of Christ? Something radical happens.

When we are baptized into the Holy Spirit, when we become believers, we need to recognize if you're a covenant child and you were baptized as a child and you've become a Christian and you've accepted Christ as your Savior that was promised to you in baptism and example in the life of your parents and in the church community.

You need to recognize that you've moved from darkness to light when you accepted Christ as your Savior. Or if you're baptized as an adult, it reminds us and symbolizes that it's a new beginning, that you've changed citizenship, that you're not in the same place.

A death to death and a beginning of life. You are a different place as a Christian. We died to sin. And then in verses 5 to 7, it speaks about, going on to speak about, we have been united with Christ.

This is a hugely significant biblical theological truth that we are as believers, united to Jesus Christ.

[21 : 25] We are fused and alive in Jesus Christ for if we have been united with Him in His death, we shall certainly be united with Him in the resurrection like His.

That means we are united in His resurrection power. We are alive. We are not dead to sin. We are not, sorry, we are not dead to Christ.

We are no longer separated. We are alive in relationship with Jesus in His resurrection power. Now I guarantee nearly every one of us here will be saying, I don't feel His resurrection power.

I don't feel very powerful and important and significant. I don't feel like I'm doing anything that Jesus in His power could do. And His radical resurrection doesn't feel like anything. I experience from week to week in my Christian life.

I don't feel the power. What can I just encourage you and say, every time you bow the knee as a Christian, every time you can say, I love the Lord Jesus Christ, every time you give a cup of cold water in the name of Christ, every time you forgive a fellow Christian, that is evidencing the power of a new life.

[22 : 39] You can't do that without resurrection power, without having moved from darkness to light. You can't love Him, you can't sing, worship to Him, you can't be under the authority of His Word and submit to it unless you have come to Jesus Christ and you know the power of a new life.

It might not be dramatic. It might not be evidential in some kind of dramatic, miraculous, powerful way. But it is. And why does this matter, because I can say today to myself and need to remind myself that I'm not sin free.

Okay, I'm not sin free and you're not sin free, but you are free not to sin. Now there's a great difference here, that's the power of the resurrection.

You could never say that before you became a Christian. Now you can say, I am free not to sin. I can choose not to sin, because I'm no longer enslaved.

I am free. For the one who has died, verse 7, has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. So there is a freedom that we maybe don't recognize and don't appreciate that we are no longer enslaved to do wrong things.

[23 : 55] We are no longer bound to sin. We are free not to sin rather than being sin free. Do you get that difference?

We are able to please Him, because we've moved because of what Jesus has done from darkness to light. So one thing we can never say, we often do, but when we understand our position in Christ, we can never actually say, I had to sin there.

I had to sin, I couldn't stop it. It was just more powerful than my ability to resist. Now that often happens to us in our lives. It seems like that, that we just, there's nothing we can do about it.

We just give in to temptation. But the power of resurrection life says we are in a different place.

We are dead to that reign of sin in our lives and the power of sin over us. Yes, I know we fail, I know we sin, I know we're forgiven, I know I'll lose my temper, I know I will not love, I know I will lust, and I will know wrong things, because there is an old nature dying within me that needs to be crucified and needs to be resisted.

[25 : 22] But that must not be my lifestyle. I must not live separate from God and from the Holy Spirit, as if it doesn't matter, as if it isn't important.

We are to be maturing and growing and being sanctified and becoming holy, because one day our battle will be over. But we are free not to sin, and we can never say, I had to do that wrong thing.

We will make, you will make choices tomorrow. You will make a choice either to obey or to disobey. You can always choose to obey the living God. And it's a great thing to, just in the back of our minds every day say, not my will but yours be done.

Not my will but yours be done. In this decision, not my will but yours be done. Because it's the will of love. He loves us and he cares for us and he doesn't want us to go down a bad and dangerous and unhelpful route.

We are citizens of a new kingdom and we belong to Jesus. Now I just want to finish with an illustration here as well, just about anyway. I've made this illustration before.

[26 : 25] One is about the old guy, Brooks, from Shawshank Redemption. And just as an illustration of sometimes how difficult it is for us to recognize that we are free. Remember him?

If you've seen the film, obviously if you haven't, you wouldn't. He's an old guy who's been in prison all his life almost, 60 years. And then eventually he gets parole, he gets out. He's an old man. The world he goes into is very different and he can't live with it.

He can't cope with the freedom. He prefers the old life. You know, and sometimes we're like that as Christians because we don't understand, we don't appreciate what we have in Jesus and the freedom that we have.

Or many of the African-American slaves that were set free and got their freedom under charter. They weren't able to cope with the freedom. They didn't know how to deal with being free and they almost wanted back into sin or into captivity.

But maybe a more relevant illustration, this is, it's only an illustration so it will fall short. Don't pick all the holes in it. But it's only an illustration to try and make us see.

[27 : 29] Maybe you're being the employee of a company. And it's a really bad company to work for and regularly as a matter of course, it cheats its customers. There's no trust between employee and employer and between customer.

Within a zero hours contract, you're regularly underpaid and overworked. The company's always at odds with the inland revenue and it's a nightmare.

But then you get a new job. You get a new job and the job is suited to your gifts. It's where the customers and the employees share benefits and profits together where you've got a permanent contract.

You're paid for the hours you do. You're valued. Trust is built into everything. And it's a great place to work. But it's a tough change for you.

It's really tough because you're conditioned to cheat and you're conditioned to do the least profitable in a day of work. And you're conditioned to see profit at the expense of everything.

[28 : 37] And it's hard to change your thinking. What you need to recognize and I need to recognize we're not under that regime anymore. You're dead to that company, to that philosophy, to that way of thinking.

The boss of that company has no hold, no power, no strength over you. You're under a new management with a new boss and it's a brilliant place to be.

And yet so many of us struggle to fit in. It takes time and readjustment. I think that's often the case for us. I know that I know it falls. Don't all start thinking about when it falls short.

It falls short in lots of ways, that illustration. But just think that we're like that. We sometimes struggle to adapt to the freedom we have in Christ and to the power that is in us to say no to doing wrong things.

We have that in our lives. So it's possible to not believe what the Bible, what the gospel is. And it's possible to believe what it is not.

[29 : 42] Very, very, in just one minute, we finish with these two practical outworkings. The first is we need to understand who we are. Verse 11, so you must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

And he points back to the cross and what Jesus has done. We're no longer under the dominion of sin. Death, he died. He died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. We need to understand.

That's why it's so important. Such a great passage. The word consider here is, you must consider yourself dead to sin. It's the kind of word we get logical from, it's thinking through things.

We need to understand. We need to think of ourselves as dead to Christ because something happened at Calvary where that is actually the case. We are citizens of a different country.

We live out a different Christian life in the community of St. Columbus because we're citizens of Jesus Christ and we're to love one another and serve one another and be committed to one another because we're citizens of a new kingdom.

[30 : 49] We need to understand that we are dead to a life that is separated from God. You can't go from here as a Christian and live a week to week life that you have no contact with the living God through Christ, where you're separated from Him and you're quenching His Spirit by living in a life of rebellion and sin.

That is not Christianity. It is false truth. You are not saved if that's your thinking in a long-term, ongoing philosophy of life way.

Understand who we are. We have moved from darkness to light. And then secondly, live accordingly. You know, verse 12, some of the other translations put the therefore at the beginning, and so would I, you know, being a Greek expert.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies. I would rather it say therefore. Let not sin reign because it's a linking word, isn't it? Therefore is a linking word to what's gone before.

So let's live in a certain way. Therefore, don't give over your mortal body to obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.

[32 : 02] In other words, don't keep giving in to your sinful desires because that's unloving. It's unloving to God and it's unloving to your neighbor.

Sin remember separates. It's not good. God hasn't been a killjoy here. He is saying it's not good for us to give in to these desires because they're damaging and they're separating us both from God and from one another and ultimately from life.

Don't give in. Ask God to change our broken desires. They're damaging. So don't give in, but then He goes on to say, live righteously.

But rather you moved from death to life and present them. Your life, your members, your body to God as instruments for righteousness for sin will not have dominion over you since you're not on their lob under grace.

Live righteously. Live righteously because you love Him and because His laws are laws of love. And if you're not a Christian, the law seems like a law, doesn't it?

[33 : 08] And you live under that law and actually that law condemns you if you're not a Christian because it makes you see you fall short at every level. That's why it's so important to recognize the power of the law.

It condemns us. You don't love God perfectly. You don't love one another perfectly. And we're not under that law because it condemns us.

But Jesus loved God perfectly and loved one another perfectly. And we get His righteousness. That's why we are under grace. And that is a life of joy and peace.

That should be a life of joy and peace. And it's not for us when we misunderstand this and keep living separated from God as if we are still in the kingdom of darkness.

That's the encouragement to know joy and peace and freedom as Christians because we understand the gospel. May that be true for each of us today. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer.

[34 : 05] Father God, help us. Help us all to understand who we are in Jesus and who we are not in Jesus. Remind us that we have a great new king and we are citizens of a different kingdom.

Today we are part of a kingdom that will go on eternally. That death for us even in this life has had its sting removed and it is simply an entry way into the presence of Christ and the life eternal that He's promised.

So may we live as citizens. May we be, live recognizing we are dead to sin and that we have moved from that place of separation to that place of union with Christ.

May we not take the union of Christ lightly. May we not just fill our stomach with all kinds of rotten miserable sins that we spew out at the end of a week and then ask for somehow for forgiveness to go in and fill ourselves with it all again.

But may we seek to follow you and serve you and love you knowing that sin is damaging and hurtful and separating us from our fellow men and women, from our church, from those that we love and also from God.

[35 : 13] So bless us and continue with us. Amen.