

The background of the cover is an abstract, expressive painting. It features thick, textured brushstrokes in various shades of blue, from deep navy to bright cerulean, set against a dark, almost black background. Interspersed among the blue strokes are thin, shimmering lines of gold or light brown, which appear to be made of a metallic or glittery material. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and depth, with the colors blending and overlapping in a way that suggests light and shadow.

SAVED

TO

SIN

NO

Brad
Wetherell

Foreword by David Mathis

*How Union with
Christ Empowers a
Life of Holiness*

MORE

“The doctrine of union with Christ declares to us Christians that God has so removed every barrier that we are forever safe within the total salvation that Christ has accomplished. Pastor Brad Wetherell invites us into this strong assurance. May your heart be thrilled by all that is now yours in Christ!”

Ray Ortlund, President, Renewal Ministries

“With so many different approaches to spiritual formation presented to Christians today, it’s easy to lose sight of a basic but crucial question: What is the true source of our growth in the Christian life? In *Saved to Sin No More*, Brad Wetherell addresses this question by identifying, defining, and exploring the biblical reality that only through union with Christ can we become more like Christ. With the heart of a pastor and the precision of a theologian, Wetherell demonstrates how union with Christ undergirds our fight against sin and our pursuit of real righteousness. Drawing richly from both Scripture and the wisdom of saints who have gone before, *Saved to Sin No More* will be an encouragement to every Christian.”

Matthew C. Bingham, Vice President of Academic Affairs
and Associate Professor of Church History, Phoenix Seminary;
author, *A Heart Aflame for God*

“Brad Wetherell has written a clear and compelling introduction to what may be the least understood and most vital reality of the Christian life. Union with Christ makes progress in our battle against sin possible, and any teaching that misses this dynamic will only be another version of self-help. This book will deepen your appreciation of all that is yours in Christ. It will give you hope, and it will spur you on in your pursuit of a holy life.”

Colin S. Smith, President, Open the Bible; Pastor Emeritus,
The Orchard, Arlington Heights, Illinois

“The doctrine of our union with Christ is, as Brad Wetherell tells us, both a ‘joy-producing’ and ‘holiness-producing’ doctrine. Resting firmly on careful biblical work, especially on the profound and beautiful chapters of Romans 5 and 6, Wetherell has provided not just a much-needed understanding of the implications of our union with Christ, but, even more, he has provided much-needed encouragement for our daily lives as Christ followers. There is no Christian who is not in need of the help this book supplies.”

Mike Bullmore, Founding Pastor, CrossWay Community Church,
Bristol, Wisconsin

“Brad Wetherell has written an extraordinary book that will help ordinary Christians understand and embrace the significance of their union with Christ.”

Robert L. Plummer, Collin and Evelyn Aikman Professor of
Biblical Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Saved to Sin No More

Saved to Sin No More

How Union with Christ Empowers a Life of Holiness

Brad Wetherell

Foreword by David Mathis

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Saved to Sin No More: How Union with Christ Empowers a Life of Holiness

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*To Kristen,
with whom I am joyfully united in this life.*

*Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.*

WILLIAM COWPER

“There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood”

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Foreword

I FOUND A NEW FRIEND in the pages of this book. I hope you will too.

Brad and I have swapped emails, but we're yet to meet face to face. I look forward to that. But being in the same room isn't a prerequisite for friendship. A book such as this can tell you enough about a person—whether you have the most important things in common. Brad and I do.

For one, we share many of the same heroes of the faith—whether beloved dead dads such as Calvin, Newton, Tolkien, and Lewis, or still-living legends such as Carson, Schreiner, and Sinclair. Not only is Brad's writing concrete, teeming with illustrations, stories, and real life, but Brad quotes these shared heroes freely. He isn't so vain as to pretend to stand

on his own two feet alone. Of course, the biblical text is the main rock, and beyond that, Brad readily hands the mic over to worthy men of previous generations and happily stands on their shoulders. And I love that one of my more recent personal favorites, J. C. Ryle, makes a prominent cameo at the end of the book.

Speaking of the end, the main thing Brad and I share is no *thing* at all but rather is our capital-*H* Hero. This is really why I found a new friend in Brad. The “thing” of union with Christ clearly serves the enjoyment of the person to whom this union connects us. Union, for Brad, is relational.

I would not be giving away the end but rather would be helping you read your way there most fruitfully if I told you as clear as day where this whole study is headed. Brad placards the conclusion with exactly the right banner for a book on union with Christ: Philippians 3:8–11. Do you, like the apostle Paul, long to *know* Jesus? Do you want to enjoy, and keep enjoying, the surpassing worth of *knowing* Jesus?

Union with Christ—being “found in him” (Phil. 3:9)—serves the daily communion of knowing and enjoying Christ (Phil. 3:8, 10). As Brad says, “The greatest gift of union with Christ is Christ himself.” God made us to magnify his Son

by enjoying him forever, and that begins right now. Jesus has given us his word (in Scripture), his ear (in prayer), his people (in the covenant community of the local church), and his Spirit (dwelling in us), who unites us to Christ and enables life-giving, soul-satisfying communion with him. The person of Christ comes first (and last), then comes the concept of union with him, serving a living relationship with him. We don't subordinate the person to the union. Union supports our love of and delight in the person.

I know that the *doctrine of union with Christ* sounds thrilling to some ears and *meh* to others. If *union with Christ* seems boring to you, it may be because your previous exposure was too transactional and not sufficiently relational. Perhaps the emphasis was on the union, on the exchange, or on the goods, but not on the person.

The reason that some of us get so excited about union with Christ is that this doctrine brings all of Christ's benefits back to Christ himself. He's a person, not a portfolio. He's our brother, not a bank. Salvation is no mere transaction, but a deliverance *from* sin and death and a rescue *to* real life forever with the all-satisfying person for whom our souls were made.

So Brad and I also share a love for holiness. You cannot love such a Christ and not come to delight in being more like

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him through being empowered by him. As Brad says, union with Christ is not only exhilarating and joy-producing but holiness-producing. Come see why true holiness and real happiness aren't two diverging roads but are one and the same path—in union with Christ.

David Mathis

Senior teacher and executive

editor, *Desiring God*

Author, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus*

Through the Spiritual Disciplines

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Acknowledgments

I FEEL A PROFOUND SENSE of gratitude as I wrap up this project. First, I'm thankful for my church. In more ways than I could possibly mention, serving in pastoral ministry at the Orchard is a tremendous privilege and joy.

Several people at the Orchard have played a unique part in helping this book come to its final form. For as long as I've known him, Colin Smith has helped me fix my eyes on Christ and the wonders of union with him. As this project developed over the years, Colin offered significant insight and encouragement. Without his support, this book would never have come about. Jason and Heather English, Josh Parsons, and Michael Porter read each chapter, offering thoughtful comments that greatly improved this work.

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Before *Saved to Sin No More* was a book idea, it was a doctor of ministry project.¹ I continue to thank God for the wise counsel and guidance that Rob Plummer provided as my supervisor. Dr. Plummer was also the first to suggest that I consider publishing the material.

That publishing journey began with Champ Thornton's kindness to hear my idea, help me form it into a proposal, and bring it to the team at Crossway. Partnering with Crossway has been wonderful. I'm thankful for the perceptive editorial eye of Samuel James and Becca Davis. There is no question that this book is better because of their good work.

Of course, I want to express my deep love and gratitude for my family. My parents and parents-in-law offer support in so many ways, but I am especially thankful for their prayers. My kids, Joanna, John, and Lydia, bring such delight and light to my life, and I pray each day that they might enjoy every spiritual blessing found in Christ. Kristen is my best editor, my best friend, and the love of my life. I cannot thank her enough for all her help throughout this project.

1 Brad Wetherell, "Teaching the Doctrine of Union with Christ at the Orchard in Arlington Heights, Illinois" (DMin project, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), Boyce Digital Repository (103926728).

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Finally, above all, I am eternally grateful to Jesus Christ, who is my life. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

Introduction

*Blessed be the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in
Christ with every spiritual blessing.*

EPHESIANS 1:3

THIS IS A BOOK about doctrine.

Doctrine. What comes into your mind when you hear that word? Perhaps it excites you. You love diving deep into biblical studies, mining the Scriptures for treasures of truth. You enjoy listening to trusted voices from the past, gleaning insights from our brothers and sisters throughout church history. Your bookshelves are full of resources marked up with notes and highlights.

My guess is, however, that some of you have a different reaction to the word *doctrine*. It's not that you think doctrine

is unimportant. It's just, well, something you'd rather let other people worry about. You're glad that pastors and professors take time to study theology, but you're content to leave that to the professionals. If you're honest, the thought of reading about doctrine sounds a bit boring.

So why read this book? After all, this is a book about doctrine—the doctrine of union with Christ.

I think D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it best. He writes that the doctrine of union with Christ is “one of the most glorious aspects of the Christian truth, one of the most profound, one of the most stimulating, one of the most comforting—indeed I rather like to use the word exhilarating.”¹ Doctrine? Exhilarating? Yes. Let me show you why.

The Blessing We Enjoy

When I was in junior high, our school band won the most prestigious competition in the state of Illinois: the SuperState Concert Band Festival. Technically, this makes me an award-winning tenor saxophone player. But you don't want to hear me play. The truth is, I barely squeaked by (pun intended) in auditions, rehearsals, and concerts. I wasn't any good, but I was in a band with people who were. I only enjoyed

1 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 6: The New Man* (Banner of Truth, 1972), 30.

the blessing of that SuperState victory because I was united with the band.

As Christians we enjoy tremendous blessing. We have peace with God because he has forgiven our sins. We have unshakable hope because he has a home for us in heaven. We have power to endure the trials of life because his Spirit dwells within us. But this occurs only if we are united with Christ.

John Calvin says,

We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us.²

According to Calvin, if we are not united with Christ, we receive no benefit from Christ, and everything he did makes no difference for us.

That's a bold statement. But is it a biblical statement?

If you open your favorite Bible app and type “union with Christ” into the search bar, do you know how many results will appear? Zero. The phrase *union with Christ* does not

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:537.

appear a single time in any English translation that I am aware of. Romans 6:5 comes very close when it says that we have been “united with him,” but that’s it.

So how can a phrase that never appears in the Bible be so vitally important? Plenty of significant theological terms never appear in the biblical text. For example, you won’t find the word *Trinity* in the Bible, but that doesn’t mean we toss that doctrine aside. The word *Trinity* is a theological term that expresses a key biblical reality.

Similarly, the phrase *union with Christ* may not appear in the Scriptures, but the doctrine sure does. In fact, it appears so frequently and so pervasively that we often read right past it without noticing it. It shows up repeatedly in the two words *in Christ*. That phrase, or some variation of it—such as *in him* or *with him*—appears hundreds of times in the New Testament, and it often refers to the doctrine of union with Christ.

A few years ago, my wife and I were shopping for a new car, and we began to set our sights on a Volkswagen SUV. Before we started shopping, I didn’t even know that Volkswagen made an SUV. But once we started thinking about buying one, I saw them everywhere.

And once you start looking for the words *in Christ* in the New Testament, you’ll see them everywhere. For example, look at this passage from the beginning of Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. . . . *In him* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace . . .

In him we have obtained an inheritance. . . . *In him* you . . . were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1:3, 7, 11, 13)

Do you see the significance? Every spiritual blessing comes to us *in Christ*. Our redemption, our forgiveness, and all the grace we enjoy is ours *in him*. Our eternal inheritance is secure *in him*. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit *in him*. Even if we had only these verses from Ephesians, we would have reason to recognize the importance of union with Christ.

As we meditate on this doctrine, our hearts will well up with gratitude for the blessing God has shown us in Christ. It is an exhilarating, joy-producing doctrine. It is also a holiness-producing doctrine.

The Power We Need

All of us are wrestling with sin. In case you weren't aware, the church is full of stumbling, struggling saints. Not one of

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us is perfect. We know that God calls us to pursue holiness, but we also know that this isn't easy. Sin trips us up, causes us to fall, and ensnares us.

In this battle, we become prone to two opposite mistakes. The first mistake is the slide toward legalism. This happens when we see our sin, know it's a problem, and want to do something about it. But we think that the sole solution is found in exerting more effort, mustering up more resolve, and practicing more discipline. So with white knuckles and gritted teeth, we strive for a self-righteousness that we will never attain. This leads to frustration, pride, and all kinds of problems.

The second mistake is the drift into apathy. This happens when we see our sin, know it's a problem, and trust that God has done something about it. But we begin to think that the gospel basically amounts to the truth that Jesus pardons sinners, so we don't exert much effort in fighting sin. We resign ourselves to the way things are as we declare our dependence on God's grace. We become lazy about resisting temptation, and we grow far too content with certain sinful patterns.

Do you recognize yourself in either scenario? If you do, you're not alone. These mistakes leave many Christians either anxiously trying to earn God's favor or complacent in their

sinful habits. So what will help? A better understanding of union with Christ.

As we grow in our grasp of this doctrine, we will discover that we are acceptable in God's sight only because of our relationship to God's Son. Apart from him, we are hopelessly lost. But in union with him, we enter a whole new position. In Christ, we are justified. We are clothed with his righteousness, and nothing can change this status.

Therefore, we pursue holiness not to earn God's favor but because he has already lavished his favor on us. We belong to him (Rom. 14:8). We are saved by his grace (Eph. 2:8). And we live without any fear of condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Every Christian prone to legalism needs to hear this liberating news—it's all part of being united with Christ.

But if we are justified in Christ by no effort of our own, why can't we go on sinning, knowing that grace will abound (Rom. 6:1)? The answer is that in Christ, God not only pardons us; he also transforms us.

In Christ, we are not the people we used to be. We are not stuck in bondage to sin; rather, we are set free for a whole new life with him (Rom. 6:22). Having been saved by his grace, we are now set apart for his glory (1 Pet. 2:9). Having been justified, we are now being sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23). Every Christian prone to apathy needs to

hear this crucial news—it's all part of being united with Christ.

Union with Christ means we are saved. It also means we are saved to sin no more.

This reality should fill us with comfort. We won't attain perfection in this life, but there is real hope for real change. You are not hopelessly stuck in sin; you are in Christ. And union with Christ empowers a life of holiness. It also guarantees the life to come.

The Security We Desire

You cannot be a Christian without faith. But you can be a Christian without assurance of salvation. There are seasons of the Christian life when doubt or despair impede our sense of assurance like clouds covering the sun. Many times, our ongoing struggle with sin is a source of this discouragement. And yet just as the sun hidden behind the clouds is still shining, a true Christian whose assurance is hidden is still saved.

How do you get that sense of security and assurance if you do not feel it? There are many biblical answers to this question, but none is more foundational than union with Christ. As Lloyd-Jones writes, "There is nothing, perhaps, in the whole range and realm of doctrine which, if properly grasped and understood, gives greater assurance, greater

comfort, and greater hope than this doctrine of our union with Christ.”³

Why is that true? It’s true because when God brings you into union with Christ, he will not let you out.

In Christ, we are justified. In Christ, we are being sanctified. And in Christ, we will be glorified (Rom. 8:30). The more you understand union with Christ, the more you will rest assured that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God *in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:38–39).

Union with Christ is the source of every spiritual blessing, the power for the pursuit of holiness, and the bedrock of assurance. As we explore what it means to be in Christ throughout this book, I hope you will come to see the grace of God more clearly, fight sin more confidently, and rest in your salvation more completely.

A Preview of What’s to Come

At this point you might be thinking, “That sounds great, but what exactly *is* union with Christ?”

³ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 6, 30.

As I've studied this doctrine, I've found that everyone seems to agree on two things. First, union with Christ is very important. Second, union with Christ is very difficult to define. I have no desire to oversimplify the doctrine, but I do want to give you a definition you can remember.

So here's the definition that we explore in this book: *Union with Christ refers to the believer's position in Christ established at conversion, experienced in all of life, and enjoyed forever.*

I've developed this definition from one primary passage of Scripture: Romans 5:12–6:23. These are some of the most important verses in the Bible that teach the doctrine of union with Christ (though they are certainly not the only ones). So with support from other scriptures, Romans 5:12–6:23 serves as the main text for the chapters that follow.

Here's a preview of what's to come.

Chapter 1 examines what Romans 6:1–4 teaches us about the moment we come into union with Christ. At conversion, our lives are plunged into Christ. We become so identified with Christ that we can now say we died and rose with Christ. His story becomes our story. Therefore, no Christian has a dull testimony. And the more we understand the transformation God has brought about in our lives, the more awestruck gratitude we will feel.

Chapter 2 returns to Romans 5:12–21 and outlines some of the rich theological truths behind every Christian conversion. We were once hopeless and helpless—we were condemned before God, ruled by sin, and destined for everlasting death. But salvation brings us into a whole new position. Now in Christ, we are justified before God, ruled by grace, and destined for everlasting life.

Chapters 3–5 discuss how union with Christ affects our experience in all of life. Romans 6:5–19 calls us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Because we have been crucified with Christ, our old lives in bondage to sin are over. Because we have been raised with Christ, our new lives in service to God have begun. In Christ, we are new creations with new ability to resist sin and pursue holiness. If you're worn down and weary in the battle against sin, I pray that these chapters are particularly encouraging to you.

Chapter 6 helps us see that our union with Christ is something that we will enjoy forever. Romans 6:20–23 serves as a wonderful source of assurance and a glorious crescendo of Paul's explanation of union with Christ. "Eternal life," he says, is "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23). Our union with Christ is never going to end. We are safe and secure in him. And the permanence of this union fuels our everlasting hope and joy.

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Finally, chapter 7 describes the crucial role of the church in our sanctification. Union with Christ is a deeply personal reality, but it is also the shared reality of all God's people. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we have the responsibility to bear one another's burdens and build one another up. We are called to grow together.

So yes, this is a book about doctrine—an exhilarating doctrine. Understanding your union with Christ will increase your joy, empower your pursuit of holiness, and strengthen your assurance. My prayer is that as you read these pages, you will find your heart stirred by all that is yours in Christ.

Saved to Die

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! 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.

ROMANS 6:1-4

“I WANT TO TELL YOU how I stopped being [a dragon].”¹ So begins the testimony of a boy named Eustace Clarence Scrubb. Eustace had been a miserable boy with a miserly spirit. Then,

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (HarperCollins, 2008), chap. 7, Kindle.

one night, “sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.”² And a dragon he remained—until he met a lion.

The lion came to Eustace, tore off his scales, washed him in a well of living water, and turned him into a boy again. Eustace was never the same. From that day forward, he “began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But . . . the cure had begun.”³

What’s Your Story?

Union with Christ refers to the believer’s position in Christ *established at conversion*. Every Christian has a conversion story—a testimony. If I asked you to share yours, how would you begin?

Maybe, like Eustace, you’d start by saying, “I want to tell you how I stopped being a dragon.” Only, instead of “dragon,” you’d insert some other label that clearly communicated the corruption of your former life. You’d readily admit that you were a slave to some deep darkness. And you’d joyfully attest to the way that Jesus came and set you free. Your story is dramatic.

2 Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, chap. 6.

3 Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, chap. 7.

But maybe, like many believers I know, you'd start by saying, "I grew up in a Christian home." You'd go on to describe how you came to faith at a young age. You'd share some struggles you had as a teenager or a young adult. But then you'd talk about a time when you recommitted your life to Jesus and describe how you've walked with him ever since. Your story is a lot like mine.

And there is a temptation for anyone with a story like the second one. If we're not careful, we can begin to think that there wasn't much saving Jesus really needed to do for us. After all, though we wouldn't put it this bluntly, we know other people who have sinned way more and way worse than we ever have. So we might find ourselves looking at others with pride.

Or, strange as it may sound, we might find ourselves looking at others with envy. Their stories are so exciting. Their experience of God's grace is so obviously transformative. And in comparison, our stories sound dull.

Here's what I want you to take away from this chapter: If you listen to other believers' testimonies with either pride or envy, it can only mean that you have not yet grasped the extent of Jesus's saving work on your behalf.

The truth is, you and I do not need any less saving than anyone else, so there is no room for pride. You and I have

also not received any less saving than anyone else, so there is no reason for envy.

“Dull testimony” is an oxymoron. Every salvation story is dramatic. Every one is a story of death and resurrection.

Your Story Is Jesus’s Story

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3).

Do you not know? This is something Paul expects every believer in Rome to understand. This is not doctoral-level theology for elite scholars to muse on in their ivory towers. This is truth to encourage every believer: We have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

What does that mean?

Consider one pattern of conversion to Christianity. Someone hears the gospel, responds in repentance and faith, and then publicly professes that faith through baptism. When Paul talks about baptism in Romans 6, he’s talking about all this. He’s using baptism as a single word to describe the whole conversion experience. And he says that when we become Christians, we are not simply baptized into water, we are baptized into Christ.

When we come to faith in Christ, our lives are plunged into Christ. And in this union with Christ, something

remarkable happens: We become so identified with Christ that we can now say we died and rose with him. His story becomes our story.

We Died with Christ

We know Jesus's story. He was crucified, died, and was buried. But did you know that when you came to believe in him, you were buried with him? Paul says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4).

I was baptized in high school, and it was largely uneventful. I stepped into a warm pool on the stage in our sanctuary. I answered a few brief questions. I went under the water and came back out again. No one called the paramedics. There was no need for CPR. There certainly wasn't a funeral a few days later.

So what is Paul talking about when he connects baptism with burial? What does he mean when he says we died with Christ when we came to faith in Christ? I've found it helpful to think about this both from God's perspective and from sin's perspective.

Dead in God's Eyes

When God looks at this world, what does he see? We don't have to guess:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children
of man,
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.

They have all turned aside; together they have become
corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one. (Ps. 14:2–3)

When God looks at this world, he sees all our rebellion, all our corruption, and all our sin. We might do a decent job of hiding our sin from others or ignoring our sin ourselves, but God sees all of it. And as the just Judge of the universe, one day he will punish all of it.

But if you are a Christian, when God looks at you, he sees you *in Christ*. At your conversion, your whole life was plunged into Christ. And since you are united with Christ, his story has become your story—including the story of his death.

This means that when God looks at you, even though he sees someone who deserves to die for sin, he now sees someone who has died already. From God's viewpoint, what happened to Jesus happened to you. His death has become your death. You are in Christ, and he paid the penalty so you never will.

Beginning on September 7, 1940, the German Luftwaffe bombed London fifty-six times in fifty-seven days. Day after day, night after night, when the air raid sirens blared, people went into shelters. And the bombs came crashing down. But if the shelters held up, everyone inside was spared.

If you are in Christ, the just judgment for your sin has already come crashing down. But it landed on Jesus's shoulders as he hung on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). You have been spared. From God's perspective, you died with Christ. There is now no condemnation for you (Rom. 8:1).

Dead in Sin's Eyes

When sin looks at this world, what does it see? That may sound strange. Does sin really *see* anything? Throughout the Bible, we see that sin does not merely consist in our personal failures. Sin is also a powerful force. It's a force that Scripture sometimes personifies.

For example, the Bible says that sin crouched at the doorway of Cain's life, watching carefully for an opportunity to rule over him (Gen. 4:7). Sin gained mastery over humanity, enslaving us all (John 8:34). And sin is the power that has reigned throughout history, causing chaos and destruction (Rom. 5:21).

You can think of sin as a wicked tyrant seated on a terrible throne, looking out on this fallen world. Sin sees a captive humanity suffering under his dark reign in a corrupted creation. But that's not all. Sin also sees some who have escaped. They have left his dominion in the only way possible: They have died.

When we die, we leave one realm and enter another. Death does not send us into oblivion, ending our existence. Death is a departure that brings us to a new destination. And when we were united with Christ, we left sin's dominion. We "died to sin" (Rom. 6:2).

At funerals, you often hear people say, "We lost him," or, "She passed away." Similarly, if you are in Christ, sin could say the same things about you. When you were converted, sin lost you. When you were united with Christ, you passed away from the realm of sin's power.

From sin's perspective, you died with Christ. Sin no longer rules over you.

Two Common Objections

At this point, I want to address two common objections people raise when they hear this sort of teaching. The first typically comes from skeptical unbelievers, and it goes something like this: If there is no condemnation for those who are

in Christ Jesus, if God's grace is really that abundant, then what will keep Christians from sinning?

I remember taking a taxi home from O'Hare International Airport several years ago and striking up a conversation with the driver. He was a nice man and a committed Muslim. When he found out I was a pastor, he was eager to talk about our different faiths, and he shared one of his major objections to Christianity: "You believe God will forgive you no matter what you do," he said, "and therefore, you'll live however you want." He was convinced that abundant grace must lead to abundant sin.

But Paul says the exact opposite. Yes, God's grace is abundant. In fact, where sin increases, grace abounds all the more (Rom. 5:20). Every time we sin, God has an opportunity to reveal the glory of his grace. But does that mean we should "continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul's answer is emphatic: "By no means!" (6:1-2).

Why not? When we were converted, we were united with Christ. We died with Christ. And when we died with Christ, we died to sin (6:2). As my taxi driver recognized, this means that there is no condemnation for us. But this also means that sin has lost its mastery over us. We have been set free from sin's dark power, and there's no going back. We cannot live as if nothing has changed. We cannot go on willfully, unrepentantly living in sin.

But that brings me to the second objection, which is most often raised by discouraged believers. It goes something like this: If I am dead to sin, why do I still struggle with sin? If my captivity to sin's tyranny is over, why do I still give in to sin's demands? I know myself. Sin tempts me every day, and I give in far more often than I want to admit. Does this mean that I'm not united with Christ after all?

Imagine two nations. One nation is ruled by an awful tyrant, and its citizens are miserable. The other nation is ruled by a benevolent king, and its citizens are blessed. We were once in the tyrant's realm. Sin ruled over us, and we had no hope of escape. But when God saved us, he pulled us out of sin's dominion and put us into the kingdom of his Son (Col. 1:13). He gave us new citizenship (Phil. 3:20), and there's no going back.

Yet as anyone who has ever moved to a new country can attest, it takes time to grow accustomed to a new culture. Old habits die hard. And even though we are citizens of Christ's kingdom, we struggle to put off our former ways of living. Sin still tempts us, trips us up, and causes us to fall. But here's the wonderful news: All that stumbling and sinning happens in our new country. And God does not deport us when we disobey. Our citizenship remains.

Therefore, when we are discouraged by our sin, we need to remember our position. We are in Christ. We are living

under his reign. Sin will never rule over us again. Yes, it will continue to affect us and allure us. Yes, it will mar our experience in many ways. But our position remains. We are united with Christ. And in Christ, we are dead to sin because we died with him.

But that's not all. If Jesus's story is our story, then we have not only died. We have risen.

We Rose with Christ

When we are united with Christ, we become so identified with Christ that his story becomes our story. We can say that we died with Christ. And we can also say that we rose with Christ. For "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too . . . walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). When you tell your testimony, you are telling a story of resurrection. You are talking about a miracle.

The resurrection of Jesus is the epitome of a miracle. On that first Easter Sunday, a heart that had stopped for three days began to beat. Eyes that seemed closed for good opened once again. A dead man was raised to life. Christ's resurrection put the power of God on display as never before. And every Christian's conversion does the same thing.

God removed our hearts of stone and replaced them with hearts of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). God opened our blind eyes

to show us the glory of his Son (2 Cor. 4:6). God caused us, who once walked in spiritual death, to rise to spiritual life (Eph. 2:5–6). In Christ, new life is not only our future hope—it is our present reality.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul declares that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Notice the tense of those verbs. Paul does not say, “If anyone is in Christ, he *will* be a new creation.” He does not say, “The old *will* pass away and the new *will* come.” He says it’s already happened. In Christ, you are a new creation. Your old life has passed away. Your new life has begun.

Christians are not like eggs waiting to hatch. We are not hunkered down inside our shells, hanging in there until a future resurrection. We have emerged into a new life. And just like little birds, we’ve got a lot to learn. So we stumble around. We trip and fall. We don’t take off flying right away. But we really do walk in newness of life.

The Cure Has Begun

Do you see why there is no such thing as a dull testimony? It doesn’t matter if you were converted out of notorious, public wickedness or as a four-year-old in your Sunday School class. When God saved you, he united you with Christ. And Jesus’s story has become your story.

Jesus died, and you died with him. Jesus rose, and you rose with him. And rising from the dead is as dramatic as it gets! Consider taking a moment right now to thank God for the magnitude of mercy he has poured out on you.

Every conversion is a miracle of his grace. And every conversion marks the beginning of a glorious transformation.

Christians are like Eustace. From the day the lion rescued him, he “began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But . . . the cure had begun.”⁴ And from the day Jesus saves us, we become new creations. We are not yet perfect, but the cure has begun.

⁴ Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, chap. 7.

