

Identity Makes All the Difference

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[0:00] When someone is preaching to keep the text open so you can see that what I'm saying is! Hopefully just arising from what God has said and not just my own mind or my own thoughts. And do afterwards, please come. It's not just a preacher's trick this. Please do come and talk to me if there's anything that you aren't clear on, disagree with, want to go further in. It's a joy when anyone takes up somebody on that. So please do take me at my word there.

I want to begin by thinking through a theme we began with yesterday evening, if you were able to join us. And no worries if you're not, because I'm going to give you the executive summary. It is that identity, who we are, makes all the difference in life.

You'll know that our world in many ways is obsessed with questions of identity, sometimes making that inward turn of who am I, the be-all to end-all of politics and philosophy and worldview.

But there is something there that is true. Who we are will inevitably shape what we long for, what we do, how we live.

And we began last night by asking the question, who do you think you are? And really that's because Romans 5 and 6, this little subunit of this magisterial letter written almost 2,000 years ago, this subunit focuses with a laser clarity on the question of identity for the Christian person.

[1:23] So if you are here today as a Christian, which I know will be a lot of you, we are right at the very core of the engine of how we're going to live as Christians today.

And if you're here as someone who is figuring out what you make of Christianity, let me say this is a brilliant day to be here. Any day is a good day to hear the gospel, honestly. I would say that. I'm a Christian. But today particularly because you're getting a window onto the genuinely transforming work of Jesus.

Not only in terms of our past being freed from guilt, not only in terms of our future and eternity secure with Christ, but the difference it makes now for how we live in the light of those things.

And the answer Paul would have given us in Romans 5 if we had said, well, who do you think you are, Paul, from Romans 5, is simply I am somebody who is in Jesus rather than someone who is in Adam.

You could cast your eyes just across chapter 5 very briefly, and we saw a tale of two family trees. You're either in Adam, through whom sin entered the world, and so death, and so everybody sins and everybody dies.

[2:38] He says that's one family tree, but then Jesus has come, and he has reversed the flow of the world because he is the one who through one act of obedience, his death has opened up the door to life and righteousness, justification being declared innocent by God.

Here's a little thought experiment to try and get us into the mindset of Romans 5 and 6. I'm going to ask you to do something uncomfortable. I want you to think of every sin you have ever committed.

It's impossible, but think of at least how frequently, whoever you are, you will still fall short of your own standards, let alone the standards of God.

Think of those sins of omission, stuff you failed to do, sins of commission, things you've actively done. Now multiply that by every human being who has ever lived from Adam.

That is a lot. It is a black shroud, a sludge of corruption. And Paul has said that that is what has reigned up until the time of Jesus.

[3:56] That has ruled. Sin reigns, and so death. But then comes Jesus Christ, who Adam should have been, the second Adam, the last Adam, who only loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And he, in his death, took all of that filth, all of that sludge, all of that corruption, concentrated down. The image he uses to his disciples is of a cup.

And he just drains it to the dregs. That's the act of righteousness chapter 5 talks about. That is why Jesus is the one who has dealt with your sin if you're trusting in him.

And if you have faith in him, if you hold firm to him, well then you have been transferred from the family tree of death and destruction and darkness to Jesus himself.

And that's why Paul can end chapter 5 in verse 20. Have a little look down with me by saying that where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

[4:59] Grace hyper-abounded. That's the worldview that Paul says you have if you're in Christ. That's your identity. You are standing beneath now the waterfall of God's free grace in Jesus, not the kind of toxic sludge of sin and death.

That's who you are. But it raises a question. If, even as sin has grown and grown and grown, that somehow magnifies the grace of God in Jesus, which it does, well then maybe if Jesus is a get-out-of-jail-free card, we can live however we want.

What difference is this righteousness of Jesus going to make? And that is the question Paul addresses today. You can see that in chapter 6, verse 1. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Shall we contribute to the mess of the world, almost to magnify Jesus even more? And the emphatic answer, verse 2, he says it again in verse 15, by no means.

Your new identity in Jesus, who you are in Christ, is to absolutely shape how you live today. And he goes down two lines that really kind of split our chapter into two.

[6:15] The first is that he says, know who you are in Christ. This is going to take us through verses 1 to 11. Have a look down with me at verse 2, if you would. By no means, we've said, 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? If you are someone who likes notes, I know it's on the screen behind me.

There's a notice, an outline in the notice sheet that you got. We're on our first point there. We are truly buried with Jesus. That's Paul's first point. And you'll notice throughout chapter 6, as it was read, I hope, all of the language that talks about how we are included in Jesus in some way.

Even just take that little phrase, in Jesus, in Christ, 73 times in the New Testament, in Christ specifically comes up. And it goes into the hundreds when you talk about into Christ, in Jesus, with Jesus, through Jesus, to Jesus.

The biggest description of the Christian throughout Scripture is someone who is in Christ Jesus. And Paul wants to say to these believers then, and to you today, to us as we gather, wherever we're from, Scotland, America, England, Hong Kong, whatever part of the world we hail from, if you are trusting in Jesus, you are in him, and you have truly died with Jesus and been buried with him in his death.

[7:47] Do you see that? Verse 3, baptized into his death. We were buried, verse 4, 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.

He goes on, verse 5, if, since we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. There is this extraordinary truth that in a spiritual way, through God's Holy Spirit, every single believer in Jesus, is absolutely bound up with him, such that as Jesus himself died physically, and descended to the realm of the dead, and was buried, Paul can say, so closely identified with him as the Christian, that we too have died with him.

Our old self, elsewhere he says, has been nailed to the cross with Jesus, and has been carried down with him to the grave. Verse 6, 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.

Because when you die, you're set free from your bondage. In the Roman world, unless you bought your own freedom, or were freed by your master, the only way out of slavery was death itself.

Paul says, that is what has happened. You were bound to sin. You were bound to Adam. But in Christ, the most definitive line has been drawn, and your old self has gone down to the grave with him.

[9:31] But the wonderful thing for the Christian is that death is not the end. We sang right at the start of Psalm 16, David's confidence that God's Holy One, his anointed King, would not see decay.

He wouldn't stay in the grave, but would be raised to God's right hand. And Paul says, that's just as we truly died with Jesus, so we have been truly raised with him. Jesus, on the third day, rose from the tomb.

And the Christian has, again, spiritually been raised with Christ. Your old self has gone, and the new now has come in Jesus. Back home in St. Andrew's today, we've got the privilege of baptizing five people.

Possibly right now, people are going into the North Sea, which is a wonderful joy. Some students and a couple of our younger children believing for themselves. as they are lowered into the waves of the North Sea, and as I hope and pray, they are raised back up out of the water.

That is a wonderful, powerful picture of exactly what Paul is saying. You are buried with Jesus. Your sins have been washed, and now you have been raised to a new life, just as Jesus himself lives incorruptible.

[10:51] See that in verse 9? We know that Christ, our confidence is so great, 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. And the life he lives, he lives to God. Paul is saying to us today, that is who you are if you trust in Jesus Christ.

Somebody who is literally a new creation, over whom sin no longer reigns. And that's the sharp point at this stage. Because you have truly died with Jesus, because you have been truly raised with Jesus, you now, just like Jesus, are truly free to live for God, and not for sin.

Here's where the identity starts to make all the difference. You are in Jesus, not Adam. And so Paul says, believe that. Trust that.

And very specifically, he says, consider yourselves as that. Verse 11, so you also must, this really matters, you must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Jesus Christ, in Christ Jesus.

[12:14] I'm a bit of a grammar geek. In fact, I'm a bit of an all-around geek. There's lots of things I enjoy. But grammar's great, especially in the New Testament, because it really presses us into the mystery, and the responsibility of being a Christian.

So here's a little grammatical nugget for you. This, in verse 11, is the very first command in the book of Romans. Almost six and a half chapters.

All Paul has done is lay out truth. Here's who you once were. Here's your need. Here's who you are now. And this is the first point, at which, as it were, you can imagine him having his arm around the Romans.

But now he turns to face them. And he says, in view of what God has done in Jesus, consider yourself. Not do something. Not work really hard. Not go and work yourselves to the bone to become holy.

He says, consider yourself as those who are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So I take it right now, we need to pause and listen to what God is saying through Paul.

[13:18] Who are you? What is your identity? If you're trusting in Jesus, he says, you are someone who's died to sin and is alive to God through him.

And I take it there are lots of reasons, actually, this is really wise pastoral counsel and command from Paul. Because there are loads of reasons that the Christian can have for forgetting these truths.

Our prayer of confession earlier was taken from Romans 7. It's no mistake that later on in this book, Paul addresses the normal Christian experience of struggling with sin.

That's why, I'm not sure if you do it every week, but we certainly, as we gather, would have a corporate confession of sin to acknowledge before God that though we're in Jesus, we still struggle. We still practice sins sometimes.

We still fall short of God's glory. We still need to lean on his forgiveness. But it's really easy to therefore start thinking that who I am is a sinner rather than someone who's died to sin.

[14:28] It can even creep into our language, can't it? A wonderful summary of a Christian is a sinner saved by grace. But here's something a bit provocative, come and talk afterwards.

I wonder if that means that too often we think that's our default identity. who I am now is a sinner. No. Who you are now, through grace, is a saint.

Someone who's been made holy. Who is in Jesus and over whom sin has no power now. You can say no to sin.

Let me encourage you to say, who am I in Jesus? I am in Jesus. We said last night that the single biggest takeaway of chapter 5 is it's all about Christ.

Who you are, who we are together, it's all about being in Christ. Am I still a sinner? Yes, I'm someone who still sins. But I am in Jesus.

[15:28] We sang, come thou fount. And you may well have been baffled. What does it mean when we say, here I raise my Ebenezer? Ebenezer. I know that various people down in St. Andrews are like, what on earth is an Ebenezer? Simply an Ebenezer was a big rock that in the Old Testament you could raise up as a memorial.

It literally means a rock, a stone of memory. And what's the hymn writer saying? Here I raise my Ebenezer on the truth that while I was a sinner, Christ died for me.

Romans chapter 5. That's what we're to do together. To plant our flag in Jesus and nowhere else. That I'm in him every day.

And not to be drawn into the lie that the world, the flesh, and the devil would tell us that sin is inevitable. It really isn't. Not because we're great, but because Jesus is.

And that is precisely why Paul goes on from verse 12, having said, know who you are in Christ, to simply, we could summarize it as saying, be who you are in Christ.

[16:35] And the second command of Romans follows quite quickly on from the first. If it is to consider ourselves, look at verse 12 with me, let not sin, therefore reign.

The ESV, it feels a bit clunky there, all right, but the emphasis is deliberate. It's just trying to take the Greek words and make it really plain. Let not sin, therefore reign.

Don't let sin control you. Why? Well, you are now not to present your members, your body parts, to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but rather present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

You see, the Christians together are people with a new purpose. Because we're in Jesus, we are to live for God. Paul moves from courtroom language that he's used through chapter 5, the language of guilt and innocence, to military language here.

Members, those are your body parts, instruments literally are weapons. So you have gone from, in Adam, using, presenting your body parts as weapons of sin.

[17:47] well now, that person has died, you've been raised to life with Jesus, so don't do what you used to do, but present your body parts, present your very selves, he'll say in chapter 12, as instruments, weapons, tools for righteousness, for holiness, for anti-sin, and for God.

And the language of body parts is really helpful here. Consider your eyes. What will you use your eyes for?

Is it to look on good or is it to look on evil? Consider your lips and your tongue. Will you present that incredibly powerful little weapon for good or for ill?

to speak grace and build each other up as we gather over coffee and student lunch and in homes and as we worship on a Sunday. Are we going to point people to Jesus or are we going to point to ourselves or to tear down rather than build up?

Paul would say, present your tongue to God as a weapon for righteousness. Your hands. What will you do this week? What will you write?

[19:00] What will you click on to open or to close? What will you click on to send? How are we going to present our hands to God as weapons for His purposes and not our own?

Our feet. Where will we go? What will we do? Who will we spend time with? We could multiply our members and we could multiply them by the members of this own congregation.

You guys, as a body, present yourselves for God's purposes and not sins because you just don't have to. You are free to say no to sin and Satan and self and to say yes to God and so without any apology for the command, so I will do my best not to apologize as well, Paul says, do it.

There is a space in the Christian life for listening to God and taking Him at His word. We are to respond in obedience because if the Christian now forgets who they are in Jesus and presents themselves to sin, they are now living out of step with reality as it is.

It is incongruous. It is not following your identity to now go and sin, Paul says. There is a wonderful story which I hope is true, although I fear it is apocryphal, that when Queen Elizabeth was Princess Elizabeth and a little girl, her mother would send her and her sister off to parties and say, remember girls, royal children, royal manners.

[20:47] She should have said it if she didn't. That's who we are. Royal children in Christ, royal manners, dead to sin so don't live for it, alive to Christ so do live for Him.

And that's how he builds on this. Not only do we have a new purpose but we are a people with a new master, verses 15 to 20. I just want to zoom in on verse 17. Here's the crux of it.

Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness.

I'm speaking in human terms. I love the way Paul casually insults the Romans and us because of our natural limitations but they are real, aren't they? It's helpful to have these illustrations. Slavery was common in the ancient world.

And he says, look, you've changed masters. You were slaves to sin. You were in castle despair under the dominion of only that which brings death.

[21 : 57] And for those of you who can remember the moment where you became a Christian, I had the privilege of chatting to a couple of you over yesterday, you will remember vividly what it was to make real choices in life but for every choice to only be away from God.

That's why Paul can say that actually you got no gain from the things of which you are now ashamed in verse 21. Only living for self. That is what we once were with no choice.

But now, we've been taken from Adam and put in Jesus and so now we are free to live to and for God. You're no longer under that master but you now have a new one.

Freedom from sin is slavery to God and that is a wonderful, wonderful slavery to be in. And let me just say to you if you are someone here who's not a Christian, the question is not are you a slave or not?

It is simply to whom will you be a slave? We're all ultimately following a master. The question is, is that a master that leads us to death, to judgment, ultimately even to hell Jesus would say himself?

[23 : 15] Or are we serving the master who gives life so freely? And as we come to a close, that then is the wonderful good news again of what Jesus has done for us.

We are a people with a new eternity. Cast your eyes down at verse 21 with me. Referring to the old self, what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you were ashamed?

Fleeting pleasure, some joy in life, absolutely. It's one of the lies sometimes Christians can tell, which is all, you're a sinner, you must be really miserable. No, sometimes people really enjoy living in sin.

But the fun does end. You'll know that yourselves. And even if you don't feel it ends, life ends. Life ends. And whatever satisfaction comes, ultimately, it leads to death.

Verse 23, verse 21 as well, the end of those things is death. The wages of sin is death. Adam's family tree will be chopped down and burned.

[24 : 24] Jesus' family tree is the tree of life and will flourish forever. Verse 23, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And as we therefore do close and we move towards taking these elements, this bread and this wine, the privilege of the minister of the gospel is to say to you that if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, there is now no condemnation for you.

Paul, in this great section of Romans, it finishes at the end of chapter 8, he moves from this confidence to the reality of the battle of sin, as I mentioned earlier. But he says in chapter 8, verse 1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

He will one day win. Romans 8 ends in this extraordinary panorama of the unconquerable, conquering, unextinguishable love of God for us in Jesus Christ.

And so now, in light of your identity, because you know who you are, fight sin with all your might, give it no quarter, you are free from it.

[25 : 49] And God, in his mercy, equips us for the way of discipleship. Even now, as we do come to share the bread and the wine, God, by his spirit, is feeding us upon Jesus, pointing us backwards to his act of righteousness that freed us, pointing us forwards to his certain return, and equipping us now, in Jesus, together, to live for him.

let me close in prayer. Our gracious God and our heavenly Father, we acknowledge, Lord, before you that, as we have read and just even briefly considered the extraordinary truths of this chapter, we have been given a sight of eternal realities.

Lord, thank you that into the reign of sin and death, your son, Jesus, stepped in, that he took on frail human flesh, and he humbled himself even to death on a cross, and we thank you that by his, that one man's obedience, many have been made righteous.

And so, Heavenly Father, we pray, by your spirit, help us to know who we are in Jesus, enable us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive in him, and empower us by your spirit to be who we are in Jesus.

Lord, so unite our hearts and minds in Christ that we would be undivided in both knowledge and devotion, in confidence and in holiness, in trust, in him, and in a ruthlessness with the sin that can still cling so closely to us.

[27 : 45] And by your spirit, we pray, as we come to share now in the meal of Christ himself, as we eat as guests at his table, as brothers and sisters in his family, as those who are in him, feed us, we pray, and strengthen us for the life that you have given us.

Thank you for your grace in which we stand. In Christ's name. Amen. Well, we're going to respond to that word in song as we then come to the table.

The band will lead us as we sing We Remember, a song that's new to me, so I look forward to learning it and hearing you guys sing it with gusto, I hope. So, We Remember, please do join us in standing and in singing.

Amen. On the cross your suffering son Has made death perfect and revised For though our sins are scarlet His blood has made them stop this wine We come in full repentance now As we receive the bread and wine

So we come to the table And we join in the peace We remember the sacrifice God's love poured out at Calvary We come now to remember As Jesus asked before he died His body broke in blood for us But when he died past from outside So we come to the table And we join in the peace We remember the sacrifice

[30 : 35] God's love poured out at Calvary With thankful hearts we receive him We trust and we have been made free He will sustain and dwell in us And we will ever dwell in him So we come to the table And we join in the peace We remember the sacrifice We remember the sacrifice God's love poured out at Calvary We celebrate his grazer But by his death he conquered death

We look ahead to the promised soul That he is coming back again Amen. Please do take a seat.

Amen. We were thinking in our sermon About how we are united in Jesus Both as individuals but together as a body And in 1 Corinthians 10 Paul teaches us that in the Lord's Supper As we share in these gifts of creation This bread and this wine We are truly sharing in fellowship And participation in the body and blood of Jesus As his body, by his spirit We share in him, himself And so while in a very real sense The bread and the wine are ordinary things In a very real sense too We are by faith truly participating In something eternal and glorious In communion with Jesus and with one another As such this isn't a meal for anyone and everyone But it is rather a meal for those Who are laying hold of Christ by faith However shaky your own hand feels

Jesus is strong and eternal And he welcomes those who trust in him It's not a meal for the perfect But for the trusting For while we were still sinners Christ died for us If you are here as someone who isn't a Christian Who wouldn't be trusting in him Let me say you're enormously welcome But this isn't a meal for you Allow it to pass you by With no embarrassment whatsoever And you might rather like to take some time To reflect on what is happening What you've heard and seen today And as we come now to the bread and the wine Let's just take a moment's prayer And hear again some words from God About what Jesus Christ our Lord Has done for us Even while we were still sinners Christ died for sins Once for all The righteous for the unrighteous To bring us to God He who was rich became poor That we through his poverty

Might become rich He came not to be served But to serve And to give his life As a ransom for many And in this is love Not that we our heavenly Father Have loved you But that you loved us And sent your Son To be the propitiation for our sins As we take and eat now Father Please by your Spirit Enable us To look to Jesus To see him as more beautiful And believable Than anything this world would hold out And feed us We pray by faith That we might walk with him Amen Some practicalities Before we read the words of institution from scripture Your elders The elders of this church Will serve you in your seats They'll bring you the bread first And please do take it And hang on to it We will eat it all together Once everyone has received

[35 : 01] To signify that we are one body In and through Jesus Christ Likewise with the wine It'll be brought to you Please take the cup And retain it And then we will drink it all together And there is alcohol free wine For those who would like that I think it's on the right hand side of the trays As they're brought The ends Both ends of the trays So if you don't know your right From your left Fear not It's on both sides of the tray Alcohol free wine For you But here is what The Lord Jesus himself Gives us in scripture I receive from the Lord What I also delivered to you That the Lord Jesus On the night when he was betrayed Took bread And when he had given thanks He broke it And he said This is my body Which is for you Do this In remembrance of me In the same way also He took the cup After supper Saying This cup Is the new covenant In my blood Do this As often as you drink it In remembrance of me For as often

As you eat this bread And drink the cup You proclaim the Lord's death Until he comes The elders will Distribute to you That's right And drink it And drink it And drink it And drink it And drink it And drink it Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[38 : 28] Thank you.

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Thank you.

[40 : 58] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

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Thank you.

[43 : 28] Thank you.

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[45 : 58] Thank you.

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[48 : 28] Thank you.

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Thank you.