

# Participatory Identity in Christ

by Michael Flowers

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*The sermon explores the transformative identity believers have in Christ, emphasizing the interplay of grace, repentance, and baptism in shaping our new humanity.*

**Duration:** 27:34

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:11-32, John 8:11, Romans 5:21 - 6:2, Romans 6:14, Romans 8:1

**Topics:** "Identity"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the parable of the prodigal son and its relevance to our understanding of God's grace. He highlights the father's unconditional love and forgiveness towards his wayward son, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness in our own lives. The preacher then transitions to the book of Romans, specifically focusing on Romans 6. He addresses the question of whether we should continue in sin so that grace may abound, clarifying that the arrival of the law does not heal the condition of sin but rather reveals it. The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of Jesus' death and resurrection and the need for believers to live in the new humanity in Christ.

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## Transcript

We have been reading large chunks of Scripture, right? These are weighty Scriptures. These are weighty Scriptures, and defining two humanities. The old humanity in Adam, and the new humanity in Christ.

And Paul is trying, in taking these large strokes, beginning with Abraham, chapter 4, and just moving forward with these large chunks of big story stuff out of the Scriptures. He's trying to describe to them the transformation that has taken place in this historic event of Jesus Christ, his death and his resurrection, and the earth-shaking implications that that has throughout the cosmos. And it becomes notably cosmic in chapter 8. And so we're going to get there, because we want to live in chapter 8, that's for sure.

Amen. But in beginning Romans 6 today, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin, that grace may abound? That's the question. He's following up on a common misunderstanding about the gospel of grace.

And it might be sort of like if you'll remember the prodigal son who left his estate early and wanted all of his inheritance, and the father gave it to him, and he went out and he spent it on riotous living, and found himself in the pig pen, and said, wow, it was better back home than it is here. And so he returns, right? And he returns thinking he's rehearsing his lines as he's going. It's like, what am I going to say? I'm a

miserable sinner, et cetera, et cetera.

And while he's rehearsing those lines, he sees something that he doesn't expect. He sees the father coming out with open arms, running towards him, greeting him back home. Come on! Puts the ring on his finger, and the sandals on his feet, and the robe, and throws a party.

And that elder brother is there having a hard time with all of this. I think we can all relate. Well, let's fast forward a couple of years.

Say that life has become normal again on the farm, and the prodigal son is kind of doing his thing. And he's experienced the grace of God, and that memory is sort of growing faint. After a couple of years, he started to take things for granted again, right? He started living sort of what we would call the subnormal Christian life, right? And so he's sort of, ho-hum, I've got to go to church and do my thing.

And, you know, the father's good, and he's so forgiving, he's so loving, he's so full of grace. I think I'll go binge again. I think I'm going to go for a weekend binge because I know what my father's like.

In this sort of false teaching of grace that the prodigal son has been feeding on in this church that he's been attending, right? On the farm, just right off the farm, there's this church, and it's preaching this message of grace. And he's getting very, very courageous to go out and binge again because he knows that God will forgive him. After all, that's his job.

That's his job. I sin, he forgives. I sin, he forgives.

That's his job. Paul is sort of thinking about this as he aims to correct something in this misunderstanding of grace. Because truly, if you preach the gospel of grace, it can sound that way.

And that's what they were hearing. And truly, if you preach the gospel of grace, it should create that paradox and that dilemma in your understanding. It should shake you and push you to the edge and go, wait a minute.

That's too much freedom. That's too much liberation. That's too much responsibility.

Paul wants to address this misunderstanding about a gospel of forgiveness alone. A gospel of forgiveness alone. It's what seems to be emerging in the West these days.

We call it a gospel of inclusion. A gospel of inclusion without any category for repentance, sin, conversion. Those are foreign words in that gospel of grace.

No concepts of change and transformation. It's just all I believe in the forgiveness of sins, period. The reasoning goes that we must tell people that God loves them just the way they are.

And it's OK to stay that way. Sounds a little off, right? As if Paul is encouraging to continue in sin that grace may abound. That's the question.

Well, if this reign of grace and this free gift of righteousness that you're talking about in chapter five, that's moving into chapter six now, and they can't get their heads around this because they haven't fully understood the two dominions, the two humanities. And so he's walking through these early Christian communities trying to explain what's happened in Jesus. Paul says by no means should sin abound so that grace may abound.

It's just that where sin abounds, grace all the more super abundantly abounds because you can't outdo grace. Jesus held grace and its demands in a beautiful tension in the situation with the woman caught in adultery. That situation was that she's about to get stoned and that Jesus walks up and starts writing in the dirt, all the dirt that these guys that are going to stone her has done probably.

Who knows? And so the end of that story is this. He who has not sinned, let them cast the first stone and they all walk away. It's a beautiful thing.

Where are your condemners? Right. And Jesus says, I don't condemn you either. He says, I don't condemn you.

Go and sin no more. You see that tension there of grace, compassion, mercy, forgiveness. Now, having experienced this.

You're going to be a changed person. Go and sin no more. And I'll leave the tension in all of that because, you know, there's all kinds of questions that I could run into right now, but we'll get there.

And I think I'm just going to cover the first six verses today. So don't worry. I'm not going to try to get through Romans six and seven on you.

And so the situation that Jesus presented is what Paul wants to convey to his audience. That tension of I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.

How can this be the goodness of God in this community in Rome? He wants to solidify their true identity amid all the competing, conflicting and contending false identities offered to them and offered to us. Who am I is the big question. Do I matter? Who is the I when I address myself? Who am I? And now that I've become a Christian, who am I? Is that changed? Is anything changed in that identity? And that's what Paul is trying to get at in all of these chapters, because these are important matters.

Brothers and sisters, he's telling us what it means to be a Christian. That's what Paul's telling us. He's telling us what it means to have experienced union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

He's going to unpack that for us in these next three chapters. In terms of one's personhood, one's inner being, that word being is Anthropos, your inner man, better your inner person, because Anthropos refers to both male and female. There's another word in Greek that refers to males alone.

Jesus is the new Anthropos, right? He's the new humanity, the fullness of humanity, the new representative. He's pushed Adam out of the way, who was the old representative and still remains the old representative of the old man, the old Anthropos. Paul uses the word Jesus is the new Anthropos, and then he addresses that right into the very personhood of every believer.

Like in Ephesians three, we read about a month ago now. Be strengthened with power in your inner Anthropos. This is the word be strengthened with power in your inner being, translated being, person, self.

You could translate it as self. We need to be strengthened with power in our inner persons, especially in light of the contending, competing identities that are being up for grabs. Right.

This inner Anthropos, this inner self, this what's called the person, it's how one comes to understand one's personal identity in Jesus. He's saying this, as you remember, the whole of chapter six talking about enslavement and serving. It's very limited.

There's two options in Paul. And this is very important from a Pauline perspective in terms of one's personhood. He's saying by the shocking use of the images of slavery to talk about freedom.

See, that's that's what's shocking about it. When Paul talks about freedom, he uses the image of slavery. Slaves of righteousness.

Another paradox. That doesn't sound like freedom, right? When he's talking about this kind of liberation that Jesus has wrought, Paul's conviction is that there is no such thing as a truly autonomous self. That you can't redesign your identity apart from these two options.

There is no truly independent individual self in Paul's understanding. How can this be when we see this attempt everywhere we go, right? And everything that we read in the history of the church and where the church is now and what we've left behind in order to remain orthodox. This is the issue.

This is the real issue and it's centered around the one new man. Or is it the man that I want to construct in my own head? I think, therefore, I am. A Cartesian sort of Cartesian life, disembodied.

So whoever I want to be can be disembodied from my body, from my gender, from whatever. And I will construct this identity in my head. And Paul is saying there's no room for that.

I mean, you can do it. You can try it. You can live and go to the grave that way and be deceived, Paul is saying.

Paul is saying you can do this. See, it's the pursuit of autonomy and creativity into one's personhood. God have mercy on us all, because we're all tempted to reconstruct a false self.

I get it. And I have to daily remind myself I have been baptized. I am putting on the new self, not the self that I want to construct.

Right. There's those days where we might think that, wow, that self is more appealing than this self. Yet there's no truly independent individual self free from a structure of power, free from a structure of power.

Adam or Christ, old creation or new creation. That's it. Kind of simplifies it.

We can accept it. It's a heating self. You know what I mean by a self that is heating? It's got to serve something.

Bob Dylan got it. Got to serve somebody. It may be the devil.

It may be the Lord. But you've got no option to serve somebody. You see, Paul is saying that the self is under something and this is universal.

This is not like you don't even get to choose this. This is not a choice. You're either under the law and under the reign of sin.

Romans five or under grace. It's the way the chapter in six ended. So that's subjection language, you guys.

It sounds really nice to be under grace, but but it's more than just, oh, now I've been set free to do my own thing. Free from the law. Happy condition.

Sin as I please and still get remission. You ever heard that? There's something wrong with that. I don't know.

There's just something wrong with that. Free from the law. Oh, happy condition.

Is. As soon as I please and still get remission. Well, you eliminate the word sin and then you just say, do as you please.

Be who you want to be. Call it what you want to call it and do what you want to do. But don't call it sin.

Take that out. We like to clean up the biblical language. I mean, it sounds foreign.

I mean, I was listening to sitting there listening to Romans six and seven. They're going like, wow, this is foreign to our ears unless we're in the scriptures. This is really foreign stuff.

It comes from another realm. That's why it's foreign. And we live in this world and we need to be in this world, but not of this world.

Right. That's what Jesus said. I pray that they be in it, not of it.

And that is a hard thing. That's a hard thing. That's that's where the battleground is to be in it, but not of it.

That's where I struggle the most because I still want to be in this world. This gospel is for this world. It's from another realm, but it's for this world because the one we're talking about created this world.

It's his. Anyway, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and all that dwell therein. We belong to God.

And so we said that the human condition is universal in Adam to unleash the reign of sin. Which unleashed death, the wages of sin is death, sin and death reign. There's a domain.

Paul is using kingdom language. There's a domain, a dominion of sin and death. We need to recognize this.

Lest we go and cross over the border lines. We have to recognize that reign. Sin and death described as powers operating in a field of force from which one cannot immigrate.

By deciding to leave. There's no getting out on your own. You're in it.

You can't choose it and you can't wish yourself out of it. It's called slavery by an act of will. No, no, no, no, no.

I will not will my life to be different. I talked to someone this week on the phone for an hour and listened to a person justify their life. A very close person, not in this state.

And I beg this person to forgive the son. I beg this person to take the first step. There was a father.

And he said, no. I will not. It's my personality.

Okay. Okay. I beg you.

To reconsider. It takes more strength to do what I'm asking you to do. Then it takes to sit there and wait on him to come.

And say, I'm sorry. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you have parents like this.

Maybe you have friends. It's good to forgive brothers and sisters. Seven times 70 and beyond.

Because the slavery that that person's in that you react to is the slavery that you will take upon yourself. Forgiveness is freedom from the capture. The one who has offended you.

And so for Paul, the subsequent arrival of the law doesn't heal the condition of sin, but only reveals it. The more you know, I didn't know what sin was until the law came. And then I heard the do not etc.

And then, wow. Covetousness. Just this lust.

It's the same word. It's not just I want that stuff. It's lost.

A continual lust for more was evoked in my life. And I couldn't get away from it because the law had spoken into that. But it didn't set me free.

It did nothing but condemn me. It brought death. The law doesn't change the condition.

It merely brings a knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20 and increase the trespass. Romans 5:20 emancipation, liberation, freedom from the condition comes in the same way as it did in Adam.

So in Christ, the second Adam, the second human being, the new human being, the representative human for a new race of men and women. A royal priesthood, a holy nation called out of darkness into his marvelous light. It's a good deal.

Through this act of the one man, Jesus Christ, there is a new freedom from sin and death in union with him. Paul describes this new humanity as a transfer of kingdoms, a change of domains, as it were, like a passport from one place to another. From one country to another, Colossians 1:13 and 14.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into. These prepositions are important. Into the kingdom of the son he loves, resounding the baptismal affirmation from the father that we heard today.

The baptism of Christ. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Paul is saying here there is both redemption, a purchase by his very own life and the forgiveness of sins.

You see, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. It's not just the forgiveness of sins. We've been bought with a price.

Therefore, we're owned. We're not autonomous. That's what he's saying.

We're in another kingdom, another domain. Grace is not cheap. It costs the life of the son and we are given a new humanity and participating in the son within the life of the Holy Trinity.

Grace without transformation isn't grace because the grace of God has appeared and it teaches us to say no to sin. And all in God's Titus. Grace is embodied.

Grace is God himself. Grace is the Holy Spirit. We reign in life through the super abundant grace and the gift of righteousness in participation in the one new humanity, Jesus Christ.

How does this occur? Paul is saying through baptism, through the new exodus, an exodus from Satan's dominion, a liberation from Egypt, going through the waters of the Red Sea. Into the land, that new domicile. And then throughout the scripture, there are no conversions that take place without baptism immediately.

Not waiting, not catechized immediately in the scripture. Philippian jailer, probably at midnight, they're singing praises to God and the Philippian jailer gets saved there in Philippi. And then he goes and Paul preaches and he says, you and your whole household will be saved.

And then immediately at midnight, they're baptized. It's not a public declaration of your faith. It's a part of the faith.

Mark 16, 16 says this. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. Mark 16, 16.

Well, can you be saved without baptism? Of course. But that's not the norm. The thief on the cross saved.

But you don't want to be saved like that. Are you willing to do that again? Are you willing to go up there? You know who the cross was for anyway? It was for Barabbas. Jesus was on.

It wasn't his cross. There it is, brothers and sisters, a picture of the substitution of Christ. He was standing in for Barabbas and we are all Barabbas.

That's what happens in baptism. Faith and baptism were never separated as a means of becoming a Christian. Never.

What shall we do, Peter, to be saved? Repent and be baptized. Repent and be baptized in the name of the word, Jesus Christ, and you will receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism, brothers and sisters. That's what happened on the day of Pentecost.

And this is what Paul's talking about. Paul tells us about the power of baptism being planted in Christ. This is a good one.

Then we'll close. This word for united. Verse five.

If we've been united with him in a death like his and he's talking about baptism. We shall be united with him in a resurrection like his. That word united is an organic word.

There's a word in Greek for plant and it's Pytos. Well, this is Sim Pytoi and it's to grow together with. This is to be planted in such a way with Christ that you're in union.

You're abiding in the vine, as it were, is another image. Right. Sim Pytoi is to be planted in him.

Oh, let's remain planted in him. Isn't that a beautiful where you can just see the tendrils coming around you and protecting you and drawing life from that vine because he's crafted you in. And it all happens through baptism, faith and baptism.

Yes, he who believes in his baptized shall experience Sim Pytoi unification with Christ participation with Christ because he's healing creation. He uses creation, water, water in the spirit, water and the spirit. It's

not just immaterial faith, but it's faith that affects all of creation.

It's cosmic. And that's why we use water, because it's his creation. It's a symbol of life.

And out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water. Amen. And so our identity is not about being autonomous and self-defining.

We have an identity that is growing together with Christ out of the soil of Christ, participating in the divine nature, which brings a beautiful transformation of Christ likeness under grace as we abide there under grace, subjected to grace because we abide. Sim Pytoi baptism does what it symbolizes. See, baptism does what it symbolizes, the right itself, because Christ commanded it actually affects the work it symbolizes through faith.

It establishes the whole person's solidarity with Christ. In verse six says that our old anthropos, our old self, our old person was crucified. It cuts us off of sin's domain and we live in another domicile, another domain, another humanity, another reality altogether.

Another city, the new Jerusalem coming down, our mother out of heaven, the new humanity of the second Adam. We belong to Jesus and his kingdom in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's stand together.

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