

BECOME WHO YOU ARE!
Living in Light of Our Union With Christ

New Year Sermon
PBC 2026

Text: Galatians 2:19-21

Galatians 2:19–21 *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

Introduction:

As we welcome a brand-new year, we are mindful of God’s rich blessings and abundant mercy to us in 2025. We are also painfully aware of the many times we fell short of our desire to live out the grace of God we experienced in Christ. This is why it is so gracious of God to punctuate the flow of our lives with a new beginning every 365 days!

New beginnings give us an opportunity to look back on the past with gratitude for His mercy and blessings, joy in His abounding grace, and repentance for where we have failed Him or others. But new beginnings are also opportunities to look forward with new resolve and fresh commitment! We all love new beginnings and fresh starts!

This year, the start of our new year also coincides with the start of a new section in our journey through Romans. We will be traveling with Paul through three of the most important chapters in our New Testament, which teach us how to live victoriously over sin!

Everything Paul says in these three chapters is grounded in one overarching reality – our personal and permanent association with Jesus Christ. Theologians call this our “union with Christ.”

At the heart of this important theological reality is the fact that when we were saved, we didn't just receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life; we also received a brand-new identity – one that came with rights, privileges, power, riches, and responsibilities. Our new identity changes everything if we understand and embrace it.

However, many Christians fail to live in light of their new identity, either because they don't understand it or because they don't embrace it throughout their lives. They live as though salvation didn't change much about their personal lives, other than God forgiving their sins and them going to heaven instead of hell. As a result, they live powerless, joyless, and sin-infected lives that are no different from the lives they had before, except that they attend church, pray over their meals, and talk to Jesus when they are in trouble. Someone observed, "Sometimes Christians are the worst advertisement of the gospel!" Sadly, this is often true.

The text before us can change all of that for us! As we strive to understand and embrace the amazing spiritual realities of our new identity that Paul reveals in these three verses, we will find the foundation for a joyful, hopeful life marked by victory over sin and grace that is in us, through us, around us, and over us!

Let's commit that, with the Spirit's help and His enabling grace, 2026 will be a year in which we live in light of our true identity in Christ! Put differently, let 2026 be the year we strive to "Become Who We Are!" That will require five things from us, grounded in five important spiritual realities Paul reveals in these three verses.

I. We Must Understand Our New Position (vs. 19a)

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ.

Reality number 1 that Paul brings to our attention is that although we are still physically living in the old realm we entered at birth (the realm in which Adam is the representative head), we are no longer under the

power and authority of its ruling agents. ***Paul has identified three of these ruling agents as sin, death, and the Law.*** And the reason we are no longer under those ruling agents and subject to their deadly power and authority is that we have died to them!

When “I” died, that realm became dead to me! Paul put it this way in Gal. 6:14 – *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world!”*

And the implications of this reality are huge! Positionally, I occupy a very different place as a saint than I did as a sinner!

Something amazing has happened! Even though I am still in that old realm and feel its effects, temptations, and struggles, ***I am no longer formally, judicially, or positionally part of it!*** I have been taken out of that realm and placed in the realm/kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). I have been given permanent standing in that realm of grace and ongoing access to the God of all grace (Rom 5:2).

So what is my relationship to the old realm where I still live? I am dead to it! Paul takes the most formidable representative of that realm (the Law), given to guide the most privileged people in that realm (the Jews), who sinned grievously against God by violating that Law in that realm (despite their immense effort to maintain the religious scruples they developed around that Law) – and tells his readers that they no longer have any obligation or formal association with that old realm because they have died to its ruling power, the Law, and are therefore free from its power and authority!

Illustration: When someone/ something is “dead to us,” it means they no longer have any authority or influence over us! Which leads to three important questions:

A. What does Paul mean when he states we died to the law?

- It does not mean we are free from the judicial law of Human Government. Paul doesn't mean we are no longer bound by the authority delegated by God to the human government of the kingdoms where we live. Romans 13:1-7 is very clear about this.
- It does not mean we are free from the moral law of God. Paul is not saying that believers have no obligation to God's moral mandates (think Ten Commandments). We are not to live lawlessly. In fact, in Romans 13:8-14, Paul lists specific commands from the Law and reminds us of our obligation to fulfill them. Jesus summarized this when He said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself!"
- It does not mean we are free to live as we please without regard for the Law's role in prohibiting behaviors incited by our flesh. In Romans 13:12-14, Paul states, *"The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires!"*
- It means we no longer have any obligation to the ruling powers of the old realm! Sin no longer reigns over us as it does over all the unbelievers around us (Rom 5:21; 6:7,12). Death no longer has victory over us (Rom 6:8-11; 8:37-39). And the Law no longer has the authority to condemn us (Rom 8:1,34).
- We are dead to the ruling masters of the old realm because, by our death, we are no longer citizens bound to that realm. We have received a passport to a new and better realm – the realm of grace!

B. How does the Law bring this death about?

- Paul states that our death to the Law came about through the Law.
- In other words, the Law was the agency or the cause of this death!
- What Paul means is this – the Law placed us under condemnation to death for our sins. And because of the Law, that sentence was

- carried out, and we were executed for our crime – in the eyes of the Law. Judicially and positionally, as far as the Law is concerned, we paid the penalty for our crimes, and at our death, the Law has no further authority or condemnation against us!
- When our name comes up, in the eyes of the Law, there is no case against us and no further action that can or should be taken against us because we have died in the eyes of the Law.
 - ***Which raises a big question – when and how did this happen?*** I certainly don't remember dying, and the fact that I am here this morning seems to be evidence to the contrary!

C. When did we die to the Law?

- When we were co-crucified with Christ! (vs. 20a)
- In other words, when Christ was put to death as our representative, we died with him.
- This is what Paul means when he explains further in Romans 7:4, *“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”*
- There are a couple of important considerations in this statement: ***First***, it is something that happened to us – we were put to death with Christ. ***Second***, it was a one-time action that introduced an ongoing state or condition. When someone gets married, they enter a permanent state of being married. When someone graduates, they enter an ongoing status of being a graduate. And when someone dies, they enter a permanent condition. ***Third***, it was experiential for Christ but positional or judicial for us. We did not physically experience crucifixion. But judicially and positionally we did, as Paul tells us that we were united to Him in His death (Rom 6:5).
- So, when we died to the Law with Christ, we remain dead to the Law in the sight of the Law. But there is a purpose to this death! ***That purpose is that we might live to God!***

II. We Must Acknowledge Our New Purpose (vs. 19b)

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ.

So, what do people who used to live for the old realm now live for? Paul gives a definitive answer that orients us toward a new purpose in life – “We live to God.” This is what Paul said happened to Jesus (Rom 6:10-11) – “*Christ died once to sin* (the realm – we died to the same realm, but in Galatians it is described by another of its ruling authorities, Law) **but now he lives to God.**”

Q: In what sense does Jesus live to God? **A:** He was born into the realm of sin and death as a descendant of Adam. He lived His entire earthly life in the context of the old realm. When He became the sin-bearer, He took upon Himself all the weight of the curse of sin, and the condemnation of the Law came upon Him in our stead, and He died to satisfy the penalty of the Law. **However**, when He rose from the dead on the third day, God declared Him to be the Son in Power over a new realm, where everyone in that realm lives to glorify God just as His Son glorifies Him!

Living “to God” means more than just changing realms. It means we now live for a new purpose. Paul further defines that purpose in Romans 7:4, “*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*”

So... in 2026, we need to become in our daily lives what we are positionally and judicially—dead to the old realm where we lived and were enslaved to sins that were destroying us and others. We need to embrace the reality of our new life in Christ and reorient our efforts, energies, and resources so that we are cultivating and bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

And that will require something more of us:

III. We Must Embrace Our New Person (vs 20a)

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

When we were co-crucified with Christ, we didn't stay dead! We were granted ongoing life! ***Gospel life flows out of our legal death!*** In this text, Paul uses the present-tense verb "live" 4 times.

In Paul's day, crucifixion was a cruel punishment, but it was not unusual. Historians report that the Roman Empire crucified tens of thousands of people during the first century, so while it was a horrifically cruel punishment, it was not unusual.

What was unusual was that someone who had been fully crucified ended up living – no one ever did that! The Romans did not use crucifixion as a remedial form of punishment.

But there was one unusual crucifixion that took place outside the city gate of Jerusalem – the crucifixion of a Jewish Rabbi who claimed to be the Son of God and the Promised Messiah, who would restore David's Kingdom and sit on his throne forever!

His crucifixion did not end in death but in resurrection. Life, not death, was the final word! And the life restored to Jesus at His resurrection was not the same "kind" of life He had before – it was a fuller, better, and eternal life in which sin, death, and the curse could no longer touch His resurrected physical body!

There are three massive implications of this!

1. When we were co-crucified with Christ and were united to Him in death, we died!
 - Judicially and Positionally
 - Representatively and Definitively

2. But death did not have the final word! Just as death could not hold him, it could not hold us! And when he was raised to a new life, we were raised with him ***to that same new kind of life.***
3. The person who was put to death was our old self (man). The person who was raised to life is our new self (self).
 - This is what Paul means when he states, “it is no longer I who live.” The “I” he is talking about is his old self.
 - ***Illustration: Two volumes*** – and the person whose life is described in volume 1 has died. But there is a new person who now lives – and that new person is in Christ and Christ is in Him!
 - Put differently, my “Old Self” has died, and my “New Self” has been raised with Christ to a new kind of life (newness of life). And this new life is not merely positional and judicial (as was our death) – it is organic and experiential! It is rooted in a deep union with Christ, who dwells in me (Col 1:27, Eph 3:17).
 - Three illustrations help us understand this union:
 - a. ***Organically*** – He is the vine, and we are branches (John 15:1-8). The life of the branch is in its organic union with the vine. The life of the Vine is in the branches. So it is with Christ and us.
 - b. ***Relationally*** – It is like a marriage in which a man and a woman become one, even though they remain two individuals.
 - c. ***Experientially*** – Christ dwells in me through His Spirit, who acts in ways that are tangible and sensible to me (I feel them).
 - o He illuminates my understanding of God’s Word
 - o He convicts me of my sin
 - o He prompts and guides me
 - o He comforts and strengthens me
 - o He assures me of God’s love for me

So what does that look like when we are called to live out all this new reality in the old world, where our bodies still suffer under the curse and are tempted by the three great enemies – the World, the Flesh, and the Devil?

IV. We Must Adopt a New Practice (vs 20b)

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We live as the New Creation People we are – “we become what we are!” We live our new life in our old bodies, but we live them in New Creation ways and for New Creation purposes!

And the life we now live in the flesh (in our earthly, mortal, yet-unchanged bodies), we live by faith – in the Son of God

- In his promises
- By His Power
- According to His priorities
- For His Purposes

When Paul introduced the theme of Romans in 1:16-17, he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, “The just shall live by faith!” Romans 1-8 is the theological unpacking and explanation of that OT quotation.

Romans 1-4 explains how a man is justified by faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross.

Romans 5-8 explains how a justified man lives joyfully, hopefully, and obediently because of his faith in Christ’s promises to him. By faith, he believes that Christ has truly procured lasting peace with God for him (5:1); that Christ has granted him access and standing in the realm of grace (5:2); that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (8:1); that we are truly full children of God, with a full share of the inheritance His Father has given Him (8:12-17); that we will appear with Him in our own glorified bodies when He returns (8:18-30); and that He is indeed working all things for His glory and our good (8:28).

And living out this kind of faith produces transformed attitudes and actions in us! We live to bear the fruit of righteousness and peace in our lives and through our words, attitudes, and actions!

V. We Must Accept a New Perspective (vs. 20c)

*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave himself for me.***

What is different in this new realm is that I enjoy an experiential relationship with God, grounded in two incredible realities.

A. ***Jesus loves me personally*** – this is an unusually personal and intimate statement from Paul.

- We know that God is love and that He manifests this love by extending common grace to sinners and by sending His Son into the world, not to condemn it but that men might repent and be saved.
- But there is a very significant reality we often miss because we generalize God's love – it is inherently personal and individually focused.
- God doesn't just look at all of us this morning and say, "I love you all!" He looks at every one of you, no matter what you are going through, and calls you by name and says, "I love you!"

B. ***Jesus proved this love by giving himself up for me!***

Conclusion: So what do I do with these five truths?

1. I must invest the spiritual work required to understand the difficult texts where God has placed these truths for my good.
2. I must believe them and appropriate them!
3. I must reckon them to be so true that I use them to shape my thinking, orient my emotions, and direct my words and actions.
4. I must live "to God" – for His pleasure, purposes, and priorities.
5. I must display this transformed life to others around me in ways that affect them and impact them for Christ. I can't do that very well if I am willfully bound up in my sin, joyless, graceless, thankless, and self-centered.

In short, I must become who Christ says I am!
UNION WITH CHRIST DEFINED AND DESCRIBED

1. What is Union with Christ?

A. Definition

Union with Christ is the Holy Spirit's work of joining a believer to Jesus Christ through faith so that Christ truly becomes ours—and we truly participate in all he has done and gain all he has won (his life, death, resurrection, righteousness, reigning, inheritance, and glorification).

B. Description

- Grounded in a Real Relationship
- Involving Real Participation
- Receiving Real Benefits
- Resulting in Real Transformation

2. Why should it matter to us?

- It is the legal ground of our salvation *through* Christ
- It is the source of all spiritual blessings we receive *from* Christ
- It is the nature of our new identity *in* Christ
- It is the guarantee of our future *with* Christ

3. Where does the Bible most clearly teach this? (Gal 2:19-20)

4. What must we do to benefit from this amazing truth?

- We must Understand our New Position
- We must Acknowledge our New Purpose
- We must Embrace our New Person
- We must Adopt a New Practice
- We must Accept a New Perspective

UNION WITH CHRIST RECEIVED AND BELIEVED

Believing “into” Christ places us in Christ, who indwells us by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to serve as the guarantor of four things: our new status, the fulfillment of Christ’s promises to us, the full reception of all spiritual blessings, and our full and final deliverance from sin, the curse, and the wrath of God.

There are several ways the NT writers speak of our Union with Christ. Perhaps the clearest and most easily identifiable way is to use language that associates us with Christ.

When the NT writers describe us as participating “**with Christ**” in something, they are referring to our objective standing or true position before God. In other words, they are not speaking of things that are necessarily experiential or sensory. We may not feel these things are true for us, and we may not experience what we would expect from our position in our mortal bodies during our earthly existence. In other words, our objective status and positional standing before God might differ significantly from what we experience personally or feel subjectively. Nevertheless, these positions are very real. They are not legal fictions or theological constructs. They are who we really are, what has really happened to us, and where we really stand before God!

Here are 8 realities that are true of us because of something we have experienced or participated in with Christ:

1. We have been **crucified** with Christ (Rom 6.6; Gal 2.20)
2. We have been **buried** with Christ (Rom 6.4; Col 2.12)
3. We have been **raised** with Him (Eph 2.6; Col 2:12; Col 3:1)
4. We have been **made eternally alive** with Him (Eph 2.5; Col 2:13)
5. We are **seated** with Him in the Heavens (Eph 2.6)
6. We are **reigning** with Him now (2 Tim 2:12)
7. We are **co-heirs** with Him (co-inheritors) (Romans 8:17)
8. We are **glorified** with Him (Rom 8:17)