

Shall We Go On Sinning?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Carrie Moulton and I am a member of the Oakland Women's Little Faith Group.

And our reading today is a reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans, chapter 6, verses 1 through 14. What shall we say then?

Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

[1 : 20] For if we have been united with him in death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin may be done away with.

That we should no longer be slaves to sin. Because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all.

But the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God and Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought to him from death to life.

[2 : 32] And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Carrie, for that scripture reading. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. Just to let you know if you're new here, this is not a typical Sunday.

You don't normally have to listen to me up here. And also our lead pastor is gone. So this is not a typical Sunday, but we're so glad that you're here. And we will be here every Sunday worshipping and honoring the Lord's day.

I want to give a shout out to everyone who held it together last week when me, Jonathan, and Eric were all gone last week. But it seemed like, you know, Christ was still worshiped. And in the words of one of our elders, Bill Barnes, no irreversible harm was done, right?

So praise God for that. Will you join me in prayer as we open up God's word, continuing our series in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Father, we have come to listen to your voice.

[3 : 39] Not just to hear it, but to listen to it. To take heed to what you have to say to us. Because as the apostles proclaim, you alone, your son alone has the words of life.

And we so want to experience that life. So would your spirit speak to us that truth of life this morning in the preaching of your word. And would Christ be exalted here?

In his name we pray. Amen. All right, so we're in chapter 6 now of the book of Romans. And if you've been following Paul's argument in the last five chapters, you know that he's been laboring to explain the good news that we can be justified before God, righteous in God's eyes, not by dutifully

fulfilling the works of God's law, but by dependently trusting and placing our faith in the work of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

So that no matter how obediently and diligently someone has tried to not sin by observing God's law, they cannot be justified by their own self-righteousness.

And yet no matter how wicked and sinful someone else has been, they can be justified by faith in the righteousness of Christ, accepted in the eyes of God if they would just embrace his Son in faith.

[4 : 53] That's what justification by faith is. Forgiveness, honor, acceptance, belonging, and status, all by faith and not by works. Amen. If you've done some terrible things in your life like I have, or if you've failed to do the good and important things in your life that you're supposed to do, also like I have, man, this is super good news.

This is really, really good news that there's still hope for us, that we can still be right with God, not by merit, not by self-effort, but by grace through faith. But you know, without the fuller picture of who God is and how he works in this world and what he wants for us, if all we have is this simple principle that we can be justified by faith no matter what evil we do, well, that can be a dangerous thing like in a vacuum.

And you know, when I was a kid, with a simplistic, immature, and hardly formed faith, I took advantage of this dangerous thing. I remember, technically, I don't know, my parents believe I became a Christian on December 15, 1991.

I was four years old. I was by my bed. My dad asked me if I wanted to invite Jesus into my life. He said, Jesus would forgive me no matter how bad I'd been, and I was bad, all right, if I just believed in him.

Or, to use my dad's language, if I just accepted him into my heart as my personal savior. And so I prayed to Jesus. I asked him into my heart to forgive me, and I trusted him to save me.

[6 : 21] And you know, for many years after that, I was in absolute terror, all right, to my parents, to my teachers, to my brother and sister, a bad influence on my friends, a bully at school.

And you know why? Because of this wrong theological idea that I had, that because of my faith in Jesus, I had a get-out-of-hell free card, a free pass, to sin and do whatever I wanted.

Disrespect my parents. Disrespect my teachers. Beat up my little brother. Be a bully. Steal. Lie. When I got older. Consumed pornography. All because I thought I had a license to sin.

I was racist. I was sexist. And overall, I just lived to put myself first. Assert my own will. My own desires. Because in my understanding of the Christian faith, I could be unrighteous by faith.

Now, to Paul's biggest objectors, this was precisely the problem of the gospel that he preached.

The problem with justification by faith and not by works. And so, you know, while the church has, from the very beginning, always preached against legalism and against righteousness by works, it has also had to preach against something else.

[7 : 27] And here's a new word for you. I hope it's helpful. It's this word, antinomianism. Can you say that with me? Antinomianism, all right? And we take that apart. Antinomianism. Antinomas.

Namas is the law. So antinomians are anti-law. And the history behind this is basically that when Paul preached against the Pharisees and against the legalists in the first century, that righteousness and justification were by faith, some people took that to mean that they could live as unrighteously as they wanted, since Jesus would save them if they just believed.

So like, if legalism is righteousness by works, antinomianism was unrighteousness by faith. And if you study church history, you'll know that ever since this gospel of justification was first proclaimed, the church has always struggled to walk the third way, Jesus' way, apart from legalism and apart from antinomianism.

A third way outside of righteousness by works and unrighteousness by faith. So in the New Testament, you can find Apostle Paul refuting legalism here in Romans chapter 1 through 5. In his letter to the church in Galatia, Galatians chapter 3, he says, For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

No one who relies on the law is justified before God because the righteous will live by faith. But then you also see in the New Testament, the Apostles John and Jude refuting antinomianism in their letters.

[8 : 53] John writes in 1 John chapter 3, In Jude's letter, he describes some fake Christians who secretly slipped into the church, and he describes them as ungodly people who pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our sovereign and Lord.

So you see, the gospel is not just contrary to legalism. It's also contrary to antinomianism. And if we don't understand how the good news of Jesus is a third way opposing both, then we probably have a deficient understanding of the good news of Jesus, just like my four-year-old self.

If the supposedly good news we believe is that because Jesus' righteousness was credited to us by faith, we can therefore sin as much as we want so that grace might abound, we can murder, we can steal, we can lie, we can hate, we can hoard, we can whore ourselves and each other like it's no big deal to God, like it doesn't offend him, stir up his righteous wrath, or break his heart.

If this is our gospel, then can we really call it good news? And has Jesus actually saved us from anything? And see, this is how Paul's opposition understood his teaching of justification by faith.

And of course, they would have some counter-arguments, right, if this is how they understood justification by faith. So here in chapter 6, Paul addresses probably the top counter-argument that people had against his teaching on justification by faith.

[10:24] After closing chapter 5 by writing, where sin increased, grace increased all the more, Paul anticipates his objector's counter-argument here in verse 1, And that's the question.

This is a legitimate question, right? It's the same question the older brother probably had for his father when his father welcomed his younger prodigal son home, right? If you're unfamiliar with that story that Jesus once told, basically a father had two sons.

The younger says, Father, I wish you were dead. Just give me my inheritance. He goes and he lives this reckless prodigal life, spends it all, and then he returns home in shame. But what does the father do?

The father welcomes him back in, throws a party to celebrate, and now it's the father in the story who seems reckless and prodigal, especially to his older indignant son, right? To this older brother who'd spent his whole life obeying his dad, never receiving anything, though, like this party.

His dad now seems like a fool for celebrating his younger brother, the prodigal son. And you may remember I shared this story maybe a month or so ago about how we went over this with our high schoolers, this past winter retreat, and the high schoolers, too, were skeptical about the father's decision to throw a party for his son, and rightly so.

[11:44] And one of the main objections was what? How was the younger son going to learn his lesson? How was he going to stop doing such harmful things? If the father insisted on giving his runaway son his robe, his ring, throwing him a party after everything that he'd done, what was going to keep him from shaming his father, dishonoring his family, making more bad choices, and harming himself and others all over again?

And see, that's the question we're dealing with here today in chapter 6. If justification and righteousness before God is by faith and not by good works, then what's to keep us from our unrighteous bad works?

If abundant sin can lead to abundant grace, then doesn't that actually give us more reason, more incentive, more permission to sin? Why not sin as much as we want so that grace might abound all the more?

That's the question here in verse 1. Now, no surprise to us, Paul immediately answers this question in verse 2, emphatically, by no means. But the question still stands, well, why not?

Why not? And that's the question for our consideration today. Why, for what reason, should we not go on sinning? Like, what is it that will keep us from sinning if our justification and forgiveness are so freely received by faith?

[13:02] Now, before we get to Paul's reason, I want to acknowledge that this discussion about why we should stop sinning might seem like a particularly religious discussion to some of you. Maybe like an irrelevant insider conversation only for Christians.

Maybe you're here today and you don't even prefer to use the language of sin because to you, sin is just this, you know, abstract religious concept and you don't particularly consider yourself religious and certainly not of the Christian religion.

But if we could just put aside that religious baggage with the word sin for a second, can I just ask, isn't it true that all of us, whether Christian or not, we often do and think things that we wish we hadn't, right?

Things that fill us with guilt and shame or maybe we don't do and think the things that we ought and that fills us with guilt and shame as well. I mean, it can't just be me, right? Have you ever looked upon your life, your actions, your inactions, and thought to yourself, man, this is far from the person I want to be, this is far from the person I ought to be, but it seems so hard to change.

Maybe, maybe even impossible. And have you ever wondered, what's it gonna take for me to be the person I'm supposed to be? Or where might I find the resources to overcome my seemingly insurmountable flaws?

[14 : 19] Have you ever longed like I have for some kind of power, some kind of influence that could get you on the right track, like guaranteed? Well, if that's you, what Paul says here today about sin and why and how we should stop sinning might be more relevant to all of us than we think.

Because see, whether or not we call it sin, I think we're all familiar, even those of us with the strongest willpower, I think we're all familiar with that sense of helplessness in the face of our flaws. Whether it's your temper, your greed, your jealousy, your sloth, an addiction to this or that substance, to alcohol, to porn, to people's approval, or whether it's the selfishness that continues to seep into your relationships, only wreaking havoc in your workplaces and your marriages and your homes.

Come on, come on, is it not true that we're all looking for some kind of power, some kind of influence outside of ourselves to deliver us from our helplessness, to deliver us from the bondage of sin or whatever you want to call it, that thing that seems to have such a strong hold and devastating influence upon our lives, that thing we all worry will take us down the path of a breaking bad, right, from Walter White to Heisenberg, all right?

Now see, that's really what Paul's getting at here in his discussion of sin. The way Paul talks about sin here is not simply in terms of behavior as we typically think about sin.

[15 : 40] Now for Paul, and we'll talk more about this next week, but for Paul, sin is not primarily about behavior, about action or inaction. For Paul, sin is a powerful force. It's a realm, a dark, formidable sphere of influence and dominion.

Think about it like a huge, dark domain, a dark, dingy dungeon where the only way out is death.

That's what Paul understands sin to be, a powerful realm that rules us and dominates us.

He says it right here. Look with me at verse 6. Paul talks about the body being ruled by sin, enslaved to sin. Then in verse 7, there's this concept of either being bound in sin or set free from it. Or look at verse 12. He says, do not let sin reign so that you obey its desires. Verse 13 talks about not offering ourselves and our bodies to sin as if sin were some kind of God that we present ourselves as offerings unto.

And then in verse 14, Paul very explicitly calls us away from bowing down in submission to sin as our master and as our Lord. So you see, a discussion of sin according to Paul and the rest of the scriptures really is not first and foremost about right versus wrong behavior.

[16 : 52] Sin, rightly understood, is about a power, a dominion, an influence that seeks to lord itself over us, dominate us, and lead us toward death and demise.

And that's why, for those of you who are familiar with the Bible's origin story, remember what happens after the very first sin. After Adam and Eve's very first sin, they have a firstborn son, Cain, right? And he's angry with God and he's so jealous with his brother Abel, he's tempted to kill him. And what does God say to him in Genesis chapter 4? He says, sin, Cain, is crouching at your door like an enemy, like a threat, and its desire is for you and its seeking to rule over you.

So this is a word for all of us. It's not just a word about how to stop, you know, impiously breaking religious rules. God's word today prompts us to consider what power, what domain, what influence we are under.

What is the primary ruling force and principle at work in our lives and where is it going to lead? To our best and freest and most authentic selves or to bondage, demise, and destruction.

[17 : 59] Alright? That's what sin is. Alright, so that's what's at stake here. But now let's look at the reason Paul supplies for why we should not go on sinning. Even if justification is by faith and even if where our sin increases, grace increases all the more.

And his reason is actually super unique and in many ways unexpected, right? Because you see the typical reason given by most people whether religious or not for why we should not sin or why we should not do bad things the typical reason always has to do with what?

The after consequences. Right? Or in other words what will happen to us as a bad result you know, after or as a result of our sin and our wrongdoing. And that's why our high schoolers weren't sure if the father in Jesus' story did the right thing.

He didn't make his son face all the consequences and possible after effects of his rebellious behavior. Right? Because according to conventional wisdom people need to know that there are consequences to their wrongful actions.

And the more they're aware of those consequences the less wrong they will hypothetically commit. Right? If they know what's coming to them. Right? Secular people think this way religious people think this way conservatives and liberals right?

[19 : 11] Conservative Christians emphasize that if we sin then what will come next are eternal and spiritual consequences. Hell, judgment, wrath, eternal punishment right? And they're not wrong. And liberal Christians emphasize that if we sin then what will come next are the temporal and material consequences a poor quality of life and they're also not wrong.

But the point is both secular and religious both conservatives and liberals though they might emphasize different consequences what they all share in common is that they appeal to after consequences.

Or another way we could put it is that they all appeal again to self-interest. It's like if the father told his sons don't disobey my household rules or else something bad is going to happen to you in this life or the next.

Now again this is not untrue. There are consequences to sin that should deter us but the question I want to ask is what if the after consequences of sin aren't the only or the most compelling factors that ought to dissuade us from going on in sin?

What's interesting and unique about the reason Paul gives for why we should not go on sinning the reason doesn't have to do with what would happen to us if we sinned rather the reason has to do with what has already happened to Christ and for us when we've already sinned.

[20 : 37] And this is the gospel. Paul doesn't say in verse 2 by no means because if you go on sinning something terrible is going to happen to you. No. He says in verse 2 by no means we are those who have died to sin how can we live in it any longer?

He doesn't point us forward to what terror might befall us as a payment for our sin he points us backwards to the terror that befell Jesus Christ and if we have been united with Christ by faith he points us to what has already been done for us and in us through Christ and how inconsistent it is with our identity in Christ.

Look at verse 3 what does it mean that we have died to sin? Well he points us to our baptism right?

Verse 3 Now he's not saying that baptism in and of itself apart from faith unites us with Christ but what baptism signifies and what it seals unto us if we receive it by faith is our union with Christ.

The church's sacraments of baptism always made visible a person's union with Christ and that's another term I want us to get familiar with union with Christ and that's why Paul uses the language of being baptized into Christ or Jesus says baptize them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and what union with Christ means is that everything that is Christ is ours.

When we are united with him by faith his death is not just in the place of our death but in a real way his death is our death. Verse 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life.

[22 : 23] See in union with Christ Christ's death is our death Christ's burial is our burial and his resurrection life is ours too. Verse 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

So to sum this up the reason Paul gives for why Christians should not go on sinning is because they are dead in sin. And they are dead in sin because they've been united to Christ who already died to sin upon the cross.

You see when Christ became sin and bore our curse and died on the cross he did so to break sin's dominion and rule over us because see sin as a dominion it had rightful claim over all of us because of how complicit we have been with sin we were not just born in sin we've all lived and walked in sin sin has ruled each and every one of us for a very long time it owned us like rightfully it owned us we walked right into its domain we threw away the key and the only way out was death a formidable dominion that's what sin is with a mighty hold on each of us in its grip but the good news of Jesus is that though death was the only way out of this dungeon in Christ verse 6 our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin and you know what this means for our relationship to sin and its former bondage if we've been united with Christ by faith it

says so right here in verses 9 and 10 for we know that since Christ was raised from the dead he cannot die again death no longer has mastery over him the death he died he died once for all but the life he lives he lives to God the good news of Jesus is that he not only died to sin and freed us from its bondage paid the debt we owed but he rose and he lives forever unto God and this is true freedom not the ability to do whatever sin we want but resurrection life in the direction of God the direction we were always intended to run in in the first place and so what Paul preaches in order that all who read this letter including us might not go on sinning is this verse 11 in the same way count yourselves reckon yourselves he says think of yourselves understand your true identity in Christ as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus verse 12 therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires he doesn't say if you sin you'll go to hell therefore do not let sin reign he points us to the cross and our identity with him and says therefore do not let sin reign or obey its evil desires you see if we are united with Christ if we are no longer slaves to sin no longer in the dungeon the way out was death but we've been crucified with Christ so sin and death no longer have their hold sin can no longer reign with those who are united with Christ by faith if we're united with Christ we have a choice now agency freedom to not let sin reign as those united to Christ by faith and freed from sin and alive to God we now belong to a different dominion a different kingdom a different master and not a slave master like sin but a master who laid down his life for us to save us and to deliver us a master we should gladly offer ourselves and our lives unto a gracious loving sacrificial king who makes it easy for us to heed his command here in verse 13 do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness this morning church

I want to ask each of us each of you do you hear God's voice calling you to offer every part of yourself to him because if you're not offering every part of yourself to God as instruments of righteousness you're offering yourselves as instruments of wickedness to another God a lesser God who does not love you who cannot save you has not died for you will not raise you up when you die in its dungeon what part of you might God be calling you to offer up to him today as an instrument of righteousness as one who has been brought from death to life and if you haven't entered into this resurrection life by placing your faith in Jesus and offering yourself to him what might be holding you back I want to ask what is holding you back do you really have a better master because we all have a master it's just a matter of who and which one is better and I'm here to say that if it's a master other than Christ I highly doubt that it's a better master

I mean look at what Paul says here in verse 14 for sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law but under grace he says that to the church in Rome see there are only two ways there are only two ways to live with sin as your master or Christ under the burden of the law or under the fountain of grace every other master than Christ gives us law after law after law to follow with the false promise that if we try hard enough work hard enough obey hard enough we can deliver ourselves out of bondage and out of the dungeon of sin but for those of us who are united with Christ by faith with him as our king we know the truth the truth is the only way out of the dungeon of sin is death and it's either going to be our death or our death in union with Christ the free gift of grace to be received by faith and see this is the ultimate grounds for why we should not go on sinning verse 14 not because the law tells us not to sin or else right no the ultimate grounds for why we should not go on sinning it's because we are under grace see the true nature of grace and don't mistake this the true nature of grace is that it doesn't like make sin okay or permissible or not that bad no grace never makes sin okay grace recognizes sin for as evil as it is but what grace does do is it pays the penalty for our sin the highest cost the life of the son of God and to the extent that we understand what this grace cost that is the extent to which we will be transformed and live transformed lives and not go on sinning any longer listen to what the apostle Paul wrote to Titus for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age waiting for our blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior

[29 : 46] Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works that is what grace does that is what the gospel does that is what Jesus does in us when he saves us when he justifies us by faith and if I could share from my own life to close you know earlier in this sermon I mentioned the way I'd let pornography into my life as a teenager and you know for many years I felt like a slave to my lustful desires and you know for years I told myself you know what's wrong don't do it it's impure

the Bible says not to it's sinful it's unholy you're committing adultery with your eyes right you're objectifying women but I'd still fall again and again and again and then I remember one time in college I was about to lead worship at my church and it was like a big deal at this church it was a big honor to lead worship you had to be respected you had to be you know seen as mature and godly but then the Friday evening before

I fell once again I viewed pornography and I emailed my college pastor just just absolutely devastated confessing to him guilt ridden ashamed disappointed in myself feeling unfit and unworthy letting him know that I understood if he wanted to find someone else to lead worship the following Sunday but do you know what his response to me was he said Andrew tomorrow I want you to lead as someone who is not under the law but under grace as someone who's been forgiven who is now dead to sin and alive to God already crucified with Christ and risen now with him as well my pastor pointed me to Christ not to the consequences of my actions but to who I was and to whose I was in Christ and how do you think that affected the way

I led worship that Sunday and waged war against every sin in my life for the years to follow Christ church this is the power of grace shall we go on sinning that grace may abound by no means for grace has already abounded to infinity through the work of Christ and there is nothing there is nothing more powerful than the grace of God toward us in Christ crucified and risen for us will you pray with me father we want to acknowledge your holiness the depths of our sin father make us a people make us a people who mourn over our sin of many tears because of the filth that is in our lives we thank you that you're a God who can transform those tears into tears of joy and gratitude because in Christ you've already paid it all if we'll just trust him by faith you've made his death our death and you've promised us resurrection life too what a promise

God I pray that we would be a people who hate sin and love grace who hate sin and love Christ who believe that the gospel truly is good news and the only kind of news that can change the world and give hope to this world God show us how inferior every other master is to Christ the one who loved us and gave himself for us thank you for the cross thank you for the resurrection thank you for allowing us to call you our father making us your own because of what he's done your son in our place help us to remember him at this table we pray in Jesus' name amen in Jesus' name transparency fear and God is never terrible I move into I be king