

Sin Don't Have To!

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[0 : 00] Living God, we believe that you got a hold of Saul of Tarsus. You helped him meet Jesus of Nazareth.

And because of that, you changed his whole worldview. And we believe that you enabled him to think these thoughts and to write down these words for us.

Will you now, in your mercy and grace, help us understand what we've read? But even if we cannot understand what we've read, will you help us actually live in the reality they are describing?

In this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I have good news for you.

About sin. I have good news for you about sin. Not just good advice. The authors of Scripture never give us good advice about anything without first giving us good news.

[1 : 16] Any good advice is grounded in good news. Indeed, without the good news, the good advice simply could not be lived. Here is the good news about sin.

We do not have to sin. We do not have to sin. We all do. We all will.

In one way or another. But we do not have to sin. We do not have to sin. Why?

Because Jesus Christ has done something to sin. Not just about sin. He has done something to sin. And because of what he has done, we do not have to sin.

We do not have to sin. Even so, says the Apostle Paul, who next to Jesus of Nazareth is the history's greatest theologian, even so, consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[2 : 29] Why can Paul say that? Altered structures of reality. As I tried to show last Sunday, the coming of Jesus into our world alters the structures of reality.

The news spread like wildfire across the collapsing Roman Empire that something has happened in the coming of Jesus that changes the way the universe goes together.

Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension alters the configuration of our existence forever in the direction of setting captives free.

So Paul can tell believers, living in the capital city of the empire, Romans 6, verse 2, you died to sin. Verse 6, you shall no longer be slaves of sin.

Verse 11, even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Before the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, reality was configured one way.

[3 : 44] After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, reality is configured in another way and configured in a way that sets captives free.

Before God gave Sharon and me our children, reality was configured for Sharon and me one way. After God gave us our children, reality for us was configured in another way.

I tell couples who are getting married, that on a scale of 1 to 10, marriage changes your life at about a 5 or a 6. Do I have any witnesses to that?

Or 7 or 8, someone says. I tell couples who are about to bring a new baby into their lives, that on a scale of 1 to 10, bringing the baby in your life changes you at a 20.

Before our children became teenagers, reality for us was configured in one way, relatively manageable.

[4 : 52] After our children became teenagers, reality was configured for us in another way, less manageable, but much more adventuresome. Sharon and I learned two weeks ago that the city of Vancouver is now planning to rezone our neighborhood.

We live two blocks from the King Edward Station of the Canada Line, and the city wants to rezone the area within four blocks around all of the stations to allow for more significant densification.

We will likely now have a four-story apartment right behind us in the alley. Before we all heard the news, our neighborhood was configured one way.

People have worked very hard to make it a kind of village. After we heard the news, our neighbors are anxious that it's going to be configured in yet another way.

A thousand new people in a few blocks, count the cars. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[6 : 06] All things came into being through Him, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Or as the message puts it, the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

And when He did, the neighborhood was never the same again. It got reconfigured in the direction of setting captives free.

Last Sunday, I suggested the picture of a web. I suggested that we look at reality as a giant web, as a huge cobweb, if you will. And we can give names to the threads or strands of this giant web.

names like water, air, fire, earth, names like gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear energy, names like justice, mercy, light, and names like sin, and evil, and death, the enemies of life.

Before Jesus moved into the neighborhood, before He lived our life, died on the cross, rose from the grave, and was seated on the throne, sin and evil and death were woven together one way.

[7 : 25] After Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, and was seated on the throne, sin and evil and death were woven together in another way. In His letter to the Romans, and especially in chapter 6, the Apostle Paul, who many call the Apostle of the heart set free, focuses on the place that sin has in this giant web.

Before the cross, empty tomb, and ascension of Jesus to the throne of the universe, sin was present and at work in the world one way.

After the cross, and empty tomb, and ascension, sin is present and at work in another way. Sin is not gone, as we all know, but something has happened to sin.

Its place in the universe has been altered forever in the direction of setting captives free. good news, not just good advice.

Now you likely noticed, as we read Romans 6, that Paul almost personifies sin. That he speaks of sin not as specific actions or attitudes, but more as a power or a force.

[8 : 52] And we can get at what Paul is getting at by spelling sin with capital letters. S-I-N. Before the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, sin had one place in the universe.

But after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the man from Galilee, sin has a different place in the universe. Even so, consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The good advice, consider yourselves, is grounded in the good news. Dead to sin, but alive to God. At the cross and through the empty tomb, Jesus has done something to sin.

Not just about sin. And what he has done has altered the structures of reality in the direction of setting captives free. Okay.

Now, we need to hear Paul's good news in context. What he declares about sin in Romans 6 emerges out of his declaration of the gospel in Romans 1-5.

[10 : 04] And that exposition of the gospel culminates in one of the most life-giving verses in the Bible, Romans 5, verse 20, where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. The word abounded literally means superabounded. Where sin increased, where human unbelief and rebellion and rejection of God increased, the grace of God increased faster.

It's superabounded. Boy, wouldn't that be a banner to put over the city? Where sin increases, grace superabounded. superabounds. Or, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it, God's grace outruns the avalanche of sin.

Now, everywhere Paul, the apostle, announced this scandalously good, good news, a question arose. And the question is at the beginning of the text we read.

Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Good question. If God's grace outruns sin, why bother stopping to sin?

[11 : 17] If the living God delights to shower mercy and grace on sinners, praise His name, why not give God even more opportunity for delight by continuing to sin?

If we have been freely justified by the hugely merciful grace of God, and if the more we sin, the more God has the opportunity to manifest His amazing and praiseworthy grace by forgiving us, why not continue in sin?

Why not continue in sin that grace may abound? Now, it was not a merely theoretical question. Some people in Paul's day actually reasoned in that way and then acted on it.

God's free justification of sinners was used to justify freely sinning. Philip Yancey, in his great book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, tells about this little group of martyrs in the third century who devoted their last night in prison to drunkenness, revelry, and promiscuity so they'd get a good dose of grace when they died.

Yancey also tells about this extremist group in England known as the Ranters who developed a doctrine of the holiness of sin, as they called it, and acted on it by sinning as wildly as possible to give God the chance to be more gracious.

[12 : 39] Are we to sin and continue in sin that grace may abound? Paul's response is this thunderous no. May it never be. By no means. It's Paul's way of saying, are you out of your mind?

And the reason for the thunderous no is not just that sin has horrible consequences in our soul. The reason for this thunderous no is the gospel.

The good news. Chapter 6, verse 2. How shall we who died to sin still live in it? The good news is that sin is not what it was before Jesus died and rose again.

Oh, sin is still present. Sin is still bad. But though still present and still bad, it is not what it used to be. Or to be more precise, sin does not have the kind of relationship with us it once had.

Or to be even more precise, sin does not have the kind of claim on us it once had. How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

[13 : 53] Focus on that news. Died to sin. Died to sin. I died to sin. You died to sin. What is Paul getting at?

This altered structures of reality. Focus on that little phrase died to sin by asking three questions. When, how, and in what sense.

When did I die to sin? How did I die to sin? And in what sense or what degree did I die to sin? Each of these questions takes us deeper into the news and the third question being the most critical.

Okay, first question. When? When did I die to sin? When did you die to sin? Paul's answer? When you were baptized.

Verse three. When you were baptized into Christ Jesus. Notice that preposition in to. Through baptism we are immersed into a person.

[15 : 01] Through baptism we are immersed into the creator, the redeemer, the recreator. Through baptism we are transferred from the old humanity with its head the first Adam into the new humanity with its new head the last Adam Jesus Christ.

baptism Now, for Paul baptism is not some kind of magical rite that automatically actualizes what it symbolizes. The issue is not the rite per se but the reality the rite portrays namely placing one's life into Jesus Christ.

Baptism is placing one's life into the hands of Jesus Christ. In Paul's day baptism ordinarily took place at the time someone came to faith.

On the day of Pentecost for instance 3,000 people confess their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord and they are immediately immersed into the water. For many people in our day the actual rite of baptism comes long after someone has acted in faith.

So, I think we can paraphrase Paul's answer to our question when did I die this way? when you placed your life into Jesus Christ an act of faith symbolized and sealed in baptism.

[16 : 20] That's when it happened. Question two like how did I die to sin? Answer by becoming attached to Jesus.

I died to sin by becoming attached to Jesus. Other religions and philosophies call people to follow the great leader to imitate the leader and so too we we follow Jesus and seek to imitate him tall order but it goes so much deeper it goes beyond following and imitating to actually participating in and experiencing union with him we not only walk behind him or live under him we live with him and in him and he in us and get this Paul tells us that our participation with and our union with Jesus is total total we participate in and are unified with him in the totality of his life and ministry through baptism we are united with him in his death through baptism we are united with him in his resurrection and through baptism we are united with him in his ascension in his present state of being now here is the good news about sin

Jesus death was a death to sin Jesus resurrection is the resurrection to newness of life and Jesus present existence is a life lived to God how did I how do I die to sin by being united through baptism to Jesus in his death which is a death to sin Paul drives home the objectivity of this death with two bold words in verse six he says our old self was crucified with Christ in verse four he says we have been buried with Christ crucified and buried crucified this is part of what Jesus is getting at when he invites us to take up our cross and carry it daily in the first century the only people who carry crosses were those who were on their way to crucifixion buried takes it deeper new testament scholar charles cranfield puts it this way buried is the seal set on the fact of death it is when a man's relative and friends leave his body in the grave and return home without him that the fact he no longer shares this life is exposed with inescapable conclusiveness in union with

Jesus Christ we have like Christ been crucified and buried baptism is therefore a kind of funeral died with Christ and it is a kind of resurrection raised with Christ alive with Christ news not just advice Paul's giving us news not just advice about sin you can see then I think where Paul is leading us in light of this being crucified and buried with Jesus it is flat out inconsistent to continue to live in sin it is not impossible to continue to live in sin as I think Paul wrestles with in the next chapter in Romans 7 where he struggles with this tension the good I wish I do not do but I practice the very evil I do not wish Paul's point his good news is not that it is now impossible for us to sin his point is that in union with

Jesus in his death and resurrection it is now illogical for us to sin so we come to the third question the most critical one in what sense did I die to sin and to what degree and here we need to listen to Paul even more carefully Paul uses this phrase die to sin three times in the text twice with reference to believers once with reference to Jesus the key to understanding in what sense we have died to sin is understanding how Jesus has died to sin Jesus died to sin in that he paid the penalty for sin the penalty for sin is death Jesus paid that penalty he died the death and now here's Paul's major point his good news since the penalty since the debt has been paid sin no longer has a claim on

[20 : 59] Jesus and no longer has a claim on anyone united with Jesus let me try to illustrate it this way let's say you owe royal bank visa three thousand dollars as long as you owe that three thousand dollars you are alive to royal bank royal bank has a claim on you it has its clutches in you right I can see in some of your faces you know this very existentially but once the debt is paid royal bank has no more claim on you you are now dead to royal bank hallelujah or let's say I owe Canada revenue eight thousand dollars as long as I owe that debt I am alive to Canada revenue I am so to speak its slave it has its clutches in me right but imagine

Jesus coming along and paying the eight thousand dollar debt because the debt is paid Canada revenue has no more claim on me I am now dead to Canada revenue hallelujah until the next year that's the good news about sin the debt of sin has been paid by Jesus on the cross he therefore is dead to sin sin has no claim on him in union with him we are dead to sin in union with him sin has no claim on us either we are no longer beholding to sin now Paul is not saying we are now insensitive to sin in the 1960s J.B.

Phillips wrote a paraphrase of the New Testament which I think is still the best paraphrase in the English language his work on Romans 8 is brilliant but J.B.

Phillips made a mistake in his paraphrase in Romans 6 a mistake I think he lived out in his soul the rest of his life he paraphrases dead to sin as dead to the appeal and power of sin he translates verse 11 dead to the appeal and power of sin Phillips suffered depression and I think it was partly because he misunderstood Paul and tried to think of Paul in perfectionist terms Paul is not saying that we are immune to sin boy I wish that were the case sin is still operative still powerful appealing and luring still wants to get its clutches in us what Paul is declaring is that we no longer have to respond to the appeal of sin for we are no longer beholding to it the debt has been paid the claim has been nullified and in

Jesus name the sin has to let us go grapple just for a few more minutes verse seven the one who has died is freed from sin the word freed is literally justified the one who has died is justified from sin I think it means no longer obligated look at verse six our old self was crucified with Christ that our body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves of sin done away with done away with seems to imply there's no way a true disciple of Jesus Christ can sin this verb is actually used in the book of Hebrews chapter two verse fourteen where it's used of the devil and there it's rendered there it's translated rendered powerless the word means quoting John Stott not to become extinct but to be defeated not to be annihilated but to be deprived of power our old nature is no more extinct than the devil but

[25 : 19] God's will is that the dominion of both is broken okay now we can land the plane through the death of Jesus sin's hold on the world is broken the body of sin no longer has ultimate authority we no longer have to respond to sin we do and we will but the good news is we do not have to sin is no longer the master we are no longer the slave the New Testament does not simply say to stop sinning the New Testament calls us to throw ourselves on the gospel in the death and resurrection of Jesus something has happened to sin and in union with Jesus we get in on that something right in the middle of the world where we live we get in on what Jesus has done to sin I now therefore can look sin in the face and say I do not have to give in to you bitterness greed lust gluttony whatever it is

I do not have to give in to you to which sin says to me oh yes you do and besides I know you want to give in to me to which I can say to sin you are right I do want to give in to you but you are wrong because you have forgotten the gospel I don't have to give in to you Jesus Christ is dead to you I am baptized with him I am united with him in his death resurrection and ascension life you have no claim on Jesus Christ and because I belong to Jesus Christ you have no claim on me either therefore sin I am going to present the members of my body to him and not to you I am going to present my hands to him and not to you I am going to my feet to him and not to you my eyes to him and not to you my ears to him and not to you I'm going to give my my brain to him and not to you

I'm going to present my needs and drives and longings I'm going to present my glands to Jesus Christ and not to you good news not just good advice the structures of reality have been altered and Jesus calls us to lean into this new configuration before he died and rose again sin was master after he rose and died again sin is mastered by Jesus even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus in Christ Jesus in him who died and rose again and lives to set captives free that is the good news let us pray I would imagine that as I was doing my best to unpack this text and this news there were a couple of moments when you thought of things that seem to have a grip on you or that are trying to get their clutches into you

I I I invite to bring those into the light maybe a way to do that is to put your hands in front of you and figuratively put into your hands those things you struggle with and then just move your hands in a direction that says here Jesus will you take this and as we do he moves his hands toward us again takes hold of our hands takes hold of our arms puts his arms around us and says you belong to me I've done something about this in the world and because you're attached to me now it'll be different how can we ever adequately express our gratitude that you the creator and redeemer and recreator have moved into the neighborhood and you're changing the way it goes together help us live into that freedom amen