

Shall We Continue to Sin?

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 9th of September 2001. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, Shall We Continue to Sin? and is based on Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 23.

Seated. The war was over, but she did not know that.

The liberators had come to her village, but she did not realise who they were. One uniform was just the same as another.

She had lived in fear and terror throughout the whole of the occupation. Life was a desperate attempt for survival for her and the rest of the village.

[1 : 18] To avoid beatings, to ignore the abuse, to keep out of trouble, out of sight and out of the way. For all the occupation, her hollow eyes had rarely left the ground.

She had forgotten the sounds of laughter. She had forgotten love. Life was fear. How could she not be afraid of these soldiers in uniform?

How could she know that she need not fear anymore, for they were liberators and friends, not enemies? How could she know that the old regime had ended and been defeated?

And these were the triumphant liberators come to rescue. How could she know that fear was no longer the appropriate response and the appropriate way to live life?

How could she change under a new regime? Let's pray. O God, we pray that you will help us to understand your word.

[2 : 33] Write it on our hearts that we may believe it and do it. That we may live under you, our Lord and our Saviour. And bring glory to Jesus.

Amen. The liberator has come. The old regime is defeated. Sin and death.

The old regime has been overthrown by our liberator. For Christ, the victor, has defeated sin and death. And now he rules.

It is his regime. A regime of Christ, of God and of grace. The argument of Romans 6 is this.

If the dominion of the past, sin which brought death, is overthrown, as it is, then we ought not to continue to live as though we were under its dominion anymore.

[3 : 33] But rather, to live as though we were under the new dominion of Christ, of God, of grace. Paul begins the chapter by answering possible, maybe hypothetical objections to what he has said already, especially at the end of chapter 5.

In chapter 5 he contrasted, if you may remember back four weeks, the line from Adam, a line of sin that all human beings are part of.

But in contrast, the line from Christ. Paul's objections that he's answering here are these. If the line of sin that came from Adam was the cause for bringing about the grace that comes in Christ, then why ought not we continue to sin so that there may be more grace that would come from God?

It's a slightly perverse line of thought that Paul objects to, but nonetheless it is one that we can fall into and perhaps do. So Paul begins the chapter, chapter 6, page 917, with a question.

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? After all, if Adam's sin brings the grace of Christ, let's continue in sin so that there may be more grace.

[5 : 03] And Paul says in verse 2, by no means. A very strong no, definitely not. In no way should we continue in sin as Christians, even if perversely we think, it may produce more grace from God.

Not at all, in any way, should that be our case. And he argues that in this chapter, and he does so with four points in effect, an argument that consists of four stages perhaps.

The first point is that Christians are united in Christ the Liberator. We belong in him, is the first point of his argument in verses 3 to 5.

You see, not only has Jesus' death brought us forgiveness, which is what we've seen in chapters 3, 4 and 5, not only has Jesus' death means that God declares us righteous in his sight, our sins and the penalty for our sins, done away with, passed away.

But even more than that, Jesus' death has defeated the power of sin, the dominion or regime of sin. It's not only paid the penalty for our sin, but it's defeated its power.

[6 : 18] And as Paul had said earlier on, and made clear in the first half of chapter 3, Christians not only just sin, but were under the power of sin. It's dominion, it's reign, it's rule.

Jesus has defeated that. And so have we in him. And that's the point he elaborates on in these verses. Let me give an analogy.

On Friday night, we lost. So I discovered yesterday, when I arrived back in Australia, we lost.

I wasn't there. I didn't even know the score during, or even immediately after the game. But we lost. Not they lost, Richmond lost, but we lost.

I lost. I wasn't there. I didn't know the result till the next day. Didn't even know when we were playing until yesterday. That is, I'm identified in the team that I support in a sense.

[7 : 20] That's a slightly weak analogy. Our identification in Christ is stronger than that. But it's the same sort of thing. Not only did Christ die for us, in our place, as our substitute, but there's a sense in which, as he died, I died in him.

When he was buried, I was buried in him. When he rose from the dead, I rose in him. And the same is true for every Christian. So if you're a Christian who's received by faith what Jesus has done, when he died, he not only died for you, but you died in him.

When he was buried, you were buried in him. When he rose from the dead, you rose in him. So as we see those key events of Jesus and our salvation, not only was it for us, but we were in a sense in him, identified in him.

We died there on the cross. We were buried in the tomb. And we rose in him as well. How we're identified in him?

Primarily, as we've seen in the chapters leading up to this, through faith. But publicly, through our baptism into Christ. For when we're baptized, which is something that publicly, in a sense, represents the faith that is inside us in Christ, then we were baptized into his death, into his burial, and into his resurrection.

[8 : 50] That's Paul's argument in these first stages of chapter 6. But the point of stressing the fact that we're identified in Jesus, is to show us the purpose.

Paul says in verse 3, Do you not know that all of us who've been baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death? Therefore, we've been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, and here's the purpose, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we've been united with him in a death like his, we'll certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. That's the purpose of Paul's first point of his argument.

We are identified in Christ, in his death, in his burial, and in his resurrection. And the purpose of stressing that identification is, that we walk in newness of life.

Not that we continue our old life. As we'll see, Paul will elaborate on this point, in the other verses that follow. Before we get to those verses, this is already the case for Christians.

[10 : 08] Paul is not saying here something that will happen, or something that we have to make happen. He is saying, what is the case for every Christian? We are dead in Christ, buried in Christ, and we rise in Christ.

That is what God has done, already, for us. The second point, comes in verses 6 to 10. Paul elaborates, in effect, what he's already said, but uses slightly different language, from verses 3 to 5.

In verse 6 he says, We know that our old self was crucified with him, with Christ that is, so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

That is, in Christ's death, our old self was crucified. Not just part of us, and certainly not just talking about the physical body, but in a sense, us, under the regime of sin, under its dominion, in the line that stretched all the way from Adam, the first person, as he just described, in chapter 5.

There we died. Our self, in a sense, was crucified, when Jesus was crucified. It's us under the power of sin, as Paul had elaborated at the end of chapter 5.

[11 : 27] And when Christ was crucified, our old self was crucified. So that, as he says at the end of verse 6, we are no longer enslaved to sin. We're freed from its dominion.

The liberator has come. The body of sin is destroyed, verse 6 ends by saying. Not that our physical body is destroyed, that's not what Paul's talking about.

He's talking about us, under sin's power and dominion. Us in the line from Adam, as sinners, that's destroyed, or maybe better, rendered powerless.

Sin's reign over us is broken by Jesus' death. And again, what Paul is describing here is something that is already the case for Christians. So he says in verse 7, whoever has died is freed from sin.

That is what, freed from sin's dominion is what he's talking about. And again, that is already the case. If we've died in Christ, we are freed from the dominion of sin. But now then, in verses 8 to 10, again, he ties being identified in Jesus' death with being identified in his resurrection and new life.

[12 : 40] So he says in verse 8, if we've died with Christ, which is the case already for Christians, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again.

Death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. Jesus' death to sin was once for all, for all people, for all time.

So when he died to sin on the cross, we died to sin there and then, in him. And just as he rose to new life for God, so too us.

So Paul is in effect saying the same sort of thing that he said in verses 3 to 5. The purpose of our identification in Christ's death and burial and resurrection is that we walk in newness of life, that we're no longer enslaved to sin, that we live for God as Jesus lives for God.

And, he's making it very clear, that just as we are already identified in Jesus' death and burial, just as Jesus has already risen, so we ought to already live and walk in a newness of life.

[13 : 54] Now all of what Paul said so far in verses 2 to 10 is what is already the case for every Christian person. It is God's work, it is not ours. It is not we who've achieved this, it's not we who've broken the dominion, but it is God who has done it for us in Christ.

And we are identified in that work through faith and publicly through baptism into Christ. It is God who's liberated us from the dominion of sin.

And we are now freed, already freed, from its power and dominion as Christians. So Paul's third point, what do we then do in response?

And this comes in verses 11 to 14. This is the first time in the whole of the letter to the Romans that Paul actually commands his readers to do anything.

Everything up to this point has been what God has done or what people are like or what Jesus has done. But now for the first time in the letter comes a command for his readers and for us.

[15 : 02] What Paul has been saying is that dominions have changed. If we've changed from the dominion of sin to the dominion of God because of our identification in Christ, then our behaviour must change.

The old dominion of sin brings an appropriate behaviour of sin. The new dominion of God and Christ and grace brings a new appropriate behaviour.

Just as for the woman whose village is liberated after being occupied by enemies, fear is no longer the appropriate response, so too for Christians under a new dominion of God and grace.

Sin is no longer the appropriate response. In fact, sin is incongruous to live a sinful life as Christians because we're under a different dominion.

So, how can one who in Christ has died to sin been broken from its power? How can we continue to practice sin? It's ludicrous, Paul says. And he gives three commands in these verses.

[16 : 05] The first command is in verse 11. You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. That is the first thing that has to happen is that our minds need to grasp the change.

We need to realise where we are. We're no longer under that dominion because God has moved us from that dominion to the dominion of God's own grace. We need to realise where we stand.

We don't belong there anymore because God's moved us. He's changed our dominion. He's changed the rule over us. So we need to grasp in our minds consider where we now are.

We've got to realise it. The liberation is instant because in Christ God has lifted us from one dominion into his own. But we need to grasp that in our minds.

That's the first command in the whole of the letter to the Romans. Consider where you are in effect what Paul is saying in verse 11. Second command in verse 12 in the beginning of verse 13.

[17 : 08] Paul says therefore do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness.

Our minds need to grasp where we are. Secondly we must not let sin have dominion over us anymore. God's taken us from its dominion into his own so we must not let sin exercise a dominion over us.

Don't yield to its call to come back to its own dominion. Don't offer ourselves to its service. When Paul says at the beginning of verse 13 no longer present your members to sin he's talking about our faculties and bits of our body in effect.

That is don't let your legs or your arms or your mouth or your thoughts or your eyes whatever it is that sins don't let it yield back to the dominion of sin.

It's actually a military metaphor. Don't present yourself for service to the general or the major or whatever who is sin. Let me give an analogy to perhaps illustrate what Paul is saying here.

[18 : 21] You imagine two fields or paddocks with a fence between them. One fence is owned by farmer sin. We belong there in that field initially once past.

We were under farmer sin's rule. It looked quite nice. The grass was pretty green. We weren't to know perhaps that ultimately we would die in that field. But God has taken us from that field and put us into the adjacent field, his own field under the good shepherd, farmer God, farmer grace we might say.

But we can still hear perhaps farmer sin in the field next door calling us back to its allegiance. Paul is saying don't yield to it. Don't go back to that field.

In effect he's saying keep away from the fence because so many Christians try and sit on the fence as though we belong under God but we actually quite enjoy the grass that farmer sin provides for us.

It's rather tasty and rather nice. The trouble is ultimately it leads to death as we'll see shortly. Don't heed the voice of sin. Don't go back to its dominion is what Paul's command in verse 12 the beginning of 13 is.

[19 : 36] But the third command he gives is the end of verse 13 and it's the positive counterpart to the second command. The second one said don't go back to that dominion. The third one is now offer yourself to God in his service.

So he says in the second half of verse 13 but present yourselves to God as those who've been brought from death to life and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

Often people caricature the Bible as though it's full of prohibitions. Don't do this don't do that don't do that don't do this as though it's God just stopping us doing lots and lots of things. But the Bible is actually full of positive commands of things to do and very often where there are negatives there are complementary positives.

If there are only negatives we would actually be very frustrated because it was God saying don't do this don't do that and we think well what are we left to do?

So here as in so many places in scripture Paul not only says don't let sin reign but he gives the positive offer yourself to God in his service.

[20 : 50] Again let me give an example. If I was to say to you now don't think of elephants. I will bet that 95% of you have suddenly thought of elephants.

If Paul had just said don't do something the temptation to do it is very great. But by giving the positive counterpart it actually helps us understand how we avoid doing the negative.

Paul not only says don't let sin reign but he tells us how not to let sin reign by offering ourselves to God. It's a very good practical and pastoral thing to bear in mind.

When we think or feel the temptation to do something that is wrong and to yield ourselves to sin's call and its attractions and its dominion rather than concentrating on that and saying I've got to think about this which is wrong and make sure I don't do it the best thing to think about is the opposite good thing that God commands us to do.

So if perhaps we're yielding to being bad tempered or impatient and we're trying not to yield to that sin rather than concentrate on our bad temper or impatience or whatever think of the positive commands to be patient and gentle and so on.

[22 : 10] So here the same. Our focus ought not to be back on what we oughtn't to be doing but on what God calls us to do. Offer yourselves and your members your bodies your minds your thoughts your speech your actions everything about you.

Offer yourself to God and his service. Turn your back on the fence. Keep away from the fence and keep your eyes and focus on God as your new ruler and under dominion to him.

Paul in fact offers a promise in verse 14 for sin will have no dominion over you since you're not under law but under grace. That is if you offer yourselves to God and to his service.

If you offer yourselves to an obedient and righteous life as we'll see more of in a few minutes then the promise is that sin will not reign over you. Well the fourth point in this chapter and the main point of the last part of the chapter from verses 15 to 23 is concerns the new dominion.

The first half of the chapter in one sense has been about freedom. That God has liberated us from a dominion of sin. But now Paul clarifies the new dominion in which we are.

[23 : 21] Because it's not just a freedom to do whatever we like. But rather it's a freedom under the dominion of God and his grace. Again Paul responds to a possible maybe hypothetical objection to what he's been saying in verse 15.

What then? Should we sin? Because we're not under law but under grace. Picking up the expression at the end of verse 14. That is if God has just liberated us are we then free to do whatever we like and that includes free to sin.

Because no longer are we under the law of God. And again Paul with a very strong no says by no means. In no way are we to continue in sin because we're under grace.

Being under grace does not mean that we're freed from the obligations of God's law. law. But we are freed from the power of sin and its dominion. So he says then in verse 16.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves you are slaves of the one whom you obey. Fair enough sort of statement. If you offer yourself to one as a slave then you're there become your master.

[24 : 31] And the two alternatives the only two alternatives are either of sin he says which leads to death or of obedience. Now we might expect him to say either of sin or of God.

But to clarify the new dominion he says that you're either a slave of sin or you're a slave of obedience which leads to righteousness.

righteousness. They're the two options and Paul is trying to clarify the nature of being a servant or slave of God's mastership.

It doesn't mean freedom to do whatever we like including sin but rather we become in fact slaves of righteousness or obedience. Again Paul credits God with changing our dominion.

So he says in verse 17 but thanks be to God that you having once been slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

[25 : 31] And then in verse 18 the same sort of thing and that you having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness. You see the point is being set free from sin's dominion does not mean a liberty to do whatever we like but rather we now become slaves of God, slaves of righteousness, slaves of obedience.

Now the idea of suddenly becoming a slave of God as though God is like a slave trader who's bought us out from the slavery to sin and said well I'll buy you as my slave is a slightly awkward analogy for Paul to use.

It could suggest a connotation that God is perhaps some sort of nasty slave trader. Paul almost apologizes for the analogy in verse 19.

He says I'm speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. He's not saying you Romans you're stupid so that's why I'm saying this. But just because he needs an analogy to try and explain something that is so profound.

And the analogy is that God is like a slave trader. He's bought us from slavery to sin that was our previous master and now we are his slaves and that God is our master.

[26 : 43] It's a slightly awkward analogy and as I say Paul sort of apologizes for us for it. But then he goes on to say in verse 19. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity.

That was the past when sin had dominion. So now he says present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. God we've seen in recent weeks has already declared us righteous through Jesus' death.

Our sins are done away with in the sense that their penalty is paid. We're forgiven. We're declared righteous. Now Paul says under this new dominion of God into which you've been put with the power of sin broken we are now to practice righteousness in our lives.

We're declared righteous. Our sins and its penalties gone. We're forgiven for our sins. But now our obligation is to practice righteousness as well.

Well Paul finishes this chapter with motivation to live as we ought. The motivation comes in verses 20 to 23. When you were slaves of sin you were free in regard to righteousness.

[28 : 01] That is you were not under an obligation to righteousness when you were under the dominion of sin. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you're now ashamed?

The end of those things is death. That is if you'd stayed in the field belonging to farmer's sin under its rule and dominion ultimately you would have died.

Not just a physical death. That's not what Paul's talking about. He's talking about eternal death being cut off from God forever. Hell if you like. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God the advantage you get is sanctification.

That is a transformed character that is righteous. And the end, the result, the goal if you like is eternal life. That is not that we escape physical death but that we live forever with God.

That's an incentive for Paul's readers, us included, to live lives that are not under the dominion of sin but are rather lives reflecting obedience and righteousness.

[29 : 03] And then he summarizes that at the last verse, a well-known verse at the end of the chapter. For the wages of sin is death. If we had stayed as slaves to the mastership of sin then what sin would have paid us would be death.

Death cut off from God forever. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And notice that Paul does not say the wages of obedience and righteousness is eternal life as though somehow we can earn it by our activity.

But in the end even if we're slaves to God and practice righteousness and obedience in our lives, the eternal life that God gives to us is a gift and not something that we earn or deserve.

The reason Paul wrote this letter to the Romans was not to expound a theology of the gospel but was for Christians to live righteous lives.

The reason God gave the gospel is not just so that our sins could be forgiven and we continue living as we have been in the past but rather so that we may live as Paul said in chapter 1 the obedience of faith.

[30 : 17] The reason Jesus died for us is not just to pay the penalty for our sin but to break its power over us so that we may live lives of obedience and righteousness.

You see this letter in the end which so many people see is so rich and full of theology as it is, is in the end written for practical and pastoral purposes.

It is written so that we do not continue to live in sin but that we live lives of obedience and righteousness. All of us sin and fall short of God's glory as we saw in chapter 3.

But too many of us presume upon God's grace. We say it's God's job to forgive us so I might as well keep on sinning. And that is in the end committing the perverse thought that Paul is objecting to in this chapter.

Many of us would come to church, we'll say our confession, we think God's forgiven us, we go away and we'll keep on sinning knowing that next Sunday we'll come to church and we can confess our sins and we can keep on sinning the week after.

[31 : 21] Not at all Paul says. By no means must that be what you do. For God in Christ has not only paid the penalty for our sin but he's broken its power so that our lives change and we no longer live in sin.

That's why Paul wrote this letter, it's why God gave us the gospel and it's why Jesus died on the cross for us. So then our responsibility is to offer ourselves to God in obedience and righteousness.

As Paul said at the end of verse 13, we are to present our members to God as instruments of righteousness. As he said at the end of verse 19, we are now to present our members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

And I think the climax of this letter, chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, Paul says this, I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God.

Because he is the one who now has dominion over you. Don't present your bodies as sacrifices to sin, it's dominions gone. But present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[32 : 39] Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. See what the first command in verse 11 was we saw today? Consider, think about where you now stand, which is what Paul is saying here in chapter 12.

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. So that means the lives that we live will be lives that regard ourselves humbly, that practice unity, that live in harmony with each other, that love each other and even our enemies.

It will mean that we are hospitable people, that we contribute generously to each other's needs, that we pay our taxes, that we refrain from retaliating against evil, that we're not drunk, that we're not jealous, that we're not quarrelsome, that we care for our weaker brothers and sisters in Christ, that we don't cause them to stumble in faith, that we seek to please others and not ourselves.

Why those things? Because that's what Paul says in chapters 12 to 15. That's the practical goal of this whole epistle, this whole letter to the Romans. That is what being slaves of righteousness and obedience means.

That's what the obedience of faith is all about, the sorts of lives that you and I should live. The power of sin is broken. Its dominion is ended.

[34 : 08] The liberator has come. He died for us on the cross. So we must renew our minds to consider where we stand and under whose dominion we live.

We must live no longer under the dominion of sin, but under the dominion of God, of Christ, of grace, of obedience, of righteousness. And what a powerful grace that is.

It is grace not only to forgive, to pay the penalty for sin, but it is grace that breaks the power of sin and transfers us from its dominion to the dominion of God.

Let's pray.

O God, in your service is perfect freedom. Guide and strengthen us by your spirit that we may give ourselves to your service and live our lives in love to one another and to you.

[35 : 35] Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.