

Sanctification * Romans 6

March 20, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The question that we're going to look at today flows very naturally from the questions we've been looking at in the last few weeks.

If we are saved by faith, does it matter how we live?

We've established in the last two weeks that all of us have sinned but we've also seen that because Jesus died for sin on the Cross we can be saved by faith in Him. We are all sinners, but we can all be saved by faith alone.

Now if that's the case, should that change the way I live or am I free to just keep on doing what I want to do, whether it aligns with God's values or not?

Paul himself asks that question – or at least anticipates that someone else might ask it – if my sin shows how good God is, why shouldn't I keep on sinning to make God look good? (Romans 3:7-8).

The poet W. H. Auden once insightfully observed – 'I like committing sins; God likes forgiving them; it all works out in the end.'¹

That's a funny way of looking at it, but it gets at the heart of our passage today. If I am saved by faith, can I continue in sin?

Well Paul dedicates the whole sixth chapter of Romans to answering that question so let's look at what he has to say – we'll read through Romans 6 together and then organize it into a big idea at the end. So Romans 6, starting in verse 1.

NIV Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? [We've all fallen short of the glory of God but we can all be saved by the grace of God.] Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Shall we see just how much sin we can do to see just how gracious God can be?

2 By no means!

Paul literally says something like – 'may it never be.' Paul is absolutely clear and absolutely incredulous about this idea. If we are saved by faith, we need to live by faith. We need to live in a way that is consistent with God's purposes and sin is not consistent with God's purposes. It's absurd to say that we should live in sin once we've been saved. Our response to the grace of God should not be to keep on sinning and taking that grace for granted; our response should be to make that grace the centre of our lives and so honour the God who saved us.

So, shall we go on sinning so grace may increase? No way.

And then Paul explains why -

‘We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?’

That’s a really interesting theological insight that says a lot about our relationship to sin. We have died to it and so theologically speaking, we should be entirely unresponsive to it. You could go to Egypt and hold a chocolate cake in front of a mummy but he’s not going to do anything; he’s dead to the cake and don’t sense it. Paul says – ‘that’s how sin should register to us because we’ve died to sin.’

And that again is something that I think we don’t often think about. When we think about coming to faith, we often think about being made alive in Christ,ⁱⁱ but that’s not all that happened. We were made alive to Christ but we also died to sin. Look at what Paul says about that – verse 3 -

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

That is to say, when we identify with Jesus through baptism, when we go down into the waters of baptism and rise again as it were, we are symbolically connected to Him in His death. In a sense, a part of us died with Him on the cross – and it’s that part of us that thinks that sin is acceptable.

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.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

I’m going to spend more time on that passage at Easter, but for today, let’s just recognize that spiritually speaking, we died with Christ – to sin and were raised with Him to a new life. Paul goes on in verse 6 -

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--

7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now again, another incredible theological insight – when Jesus died on the Cross, it was not just Him who died there. Our old self – our old way of being that focused on our own pleasures and our own priorities – it died there on the Cross with Jesus too.

Catholic imagery tends to leave Jesus on the Cross – you ever noticed that? Their crosses have Jesus on them; our Crosses are empty. In a sense, maybe we should picture someone else on that Cross, and that's our old selves. The old Graham Gladstone, the Graham Gladstone that loved to put his own will before God's, who put pleasure before purity, who told God to mind His own business, he's dead on that Cross. So's the old _____, so's the old _____. They've died to sin, but that's not all. Look at verse 8 -

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

My old self is like a cocoon hanging there, but my new self is alive and beautiful. And then Paul tells us what our new lives should be like.

9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, [in the same way that Jesus died in relation to sin and was resurrected to live for God -]
count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Underline that. Highlight that. Memorize that. It's crucial.

Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. As far as sin is concerned, the old Graham is still hanging on that cross. But because I've been born again to a new life, the 'new me' as it were, the person I am by faith, is alive and well and focused on God. Same with you. Count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Now from here, Paul switches metaphors – from talking about death and life to slavery and freedom. Because the reality is – and I'm sure you know this – that although we may be dead to sin, we are still very much alive. And even though our old selves are nailed to the cross, they still try to exert influence over us. We still hear the siren call of sin.

And so Paul switches metaphors to help us to think about how we respond when sin comes a 'calling.

Look at verse 12 –

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Because we are dead to sin and alive to Christ, Paul reminds us – 'don't let sin continue to hold sway over your body. Don't use your eyes and ears and hands and heart to commit sin, but

instead use them in God-honouring ways, as instruments of righteousness.’ Use your eyes and ears and hands and heart as tools for doing what is right.

And please notice, even if you’re not using your body for ‘big flashy sins,’ this passage is still for you, because Paul has already identified ‘acceptable sin’ as sin too. Back in chapter 1, Paul calls greed sin. He calls envy sin. He calls deceit and gossip and arrogance sin. So that when Paul says ‘don’t use your body for sin,’ he means all sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant. You wouldn’t use a knife to stab someone, so don’t use your words to do the same thing; instead, use your words to build them up. Offer all parts of yourself for doing what is right.

And then Paul adds an interesting insight – verse 14 – [Do all this because] 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

We don’t do this to earn God’s favour – by law – we do this because God’s favour is already upon us – His grace, His all-surpassing love and forgiveness are ours – and so we make God our master rather than sin.

But again, Paul is very aware that somebody might take that and twist it. “Why shouldn’t I sin because God loves forgiving sin?”

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?

If grace and forgiveness are the atmosphere we live in, should we just keep on sinning?

15 By no means! Paul continues -

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Now right off the top, let’s just outright acknowledge that slavery is wrong and that taking another human being against their will and making them your workhorse is wrong. Always has been and always will be.

But Paul here is thinking about a different kind of slavery that sometimes happened in the ANE, where you would voluntarily offer yourself as a slave or servant to someone else. At this point in history, this was a way to get out of debt, or a way to commit yourself to a really generous master – you’d say – my situation now is not good, but with you as my master, it looks better – and you’d become their slave.

Well, Paul says here ‘You can choose to be a slave to sin, which leads to death or you can choose to be a servant to God, which leads to righteousness. There’s no third way – you are either committed to God or you are committed to sin and self.’

But he knows that the believers he's writing to have made their commitment to Jesus and to goodness. And he says – verse 17 -

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

That's true of the believers in Rome, that's true for us too, all of us who have trusted Jesus. We used to be slaves to sin, but then we heard the message of the Gospel, the teaching from Sunday School all the way up through John Bunner and George and Jack and me and we have been set free from sin to live for righteousness. That's who we are now – slaves, servants, children of God, absolutely committed to His righteousness.

And yet, the reality is, that even though that's true, sin is still enticing. We will always face its allure on this side of heaven and so Paul says what to do, yet again.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

There's the application – while you used to use your body for all sorts of unrighteous things – from pornography and substance abuse to jealousy and pride – now use your body for righteousness, living in God-honouring ways, which leads to holiness.

Paul continues – verse 20 -

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

He's right. When I look back and think about all the 'pleasure' that sin brought me, I think, 'what a bait and switch.' Before you do it, sin looks attractive, enticing, reasonable even. And yet after, what do you feel? Ashamed. Guilty. Like you've let God down and yourself down. Paul says – what benefit was there in chasing after sin? Shame in the now and death in the future. That's brutal. But, Paul says – verse 22 -

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

When we come to faith, we're 'under new management'ⁱⁱⁱ as it were, free from sin and working for the best person you ever could. And the benefits are holiness in this life and eternal life in the future. Paul lays that out quite clearly in the next verse – another one of those verses that you'll want to underline, highlight and star.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:12-23 NIV).

When we persist in sin, the only thing we earn is death; God though freely gives us the gift of eternal life when we believe.

The question then is – what do we do with that gift?

Well for one, we need to receive it. We need to turn from sin to trust in Jesus and let Him transform us from the inside out. And then, having been freed from sin and made alive to Christ, we pursue the holy and God-honouring life that God has called us to.

And that's where our question from the beginning comes in. We are all sinners saved by faith; does it matter then how we live? Can we keep on sinning? No! Of course not! We need to live in light of the gift of grace that God has given us and pursue the goodness that God has called us to. How we are now should look different, more Christ-like, than who we were when we came to faith.

And this is where the title for today comes from – this passage is all about 'sanctification' – that's the theological word for growing in holiness and Christ-likeness. When we are saved by faith, we are 'justified' – we are made right with God – and then as we live in right relationship with God, we are 'sanctified' – becoming more and more like Him in holiness and goodness. Again, Max Lucado's title is bang on – Jesus loves you just the way you are. But He loves you too much to leave you like that, He wants to make you just like Jesus.'

That process of becoming more like Jesus is 'sanctification' and this chapter I think shows us how to pursue holiness.

Verse 11 says it all.

Count yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ. That I think sums up this whole passage. Let me unpack that.

First, count yourself dead to sin.

In my experience, Paul has laid out a really accurate assessment of my life before I knew Jesus personally.

I thought that I was in control of my life, that I could define right and wrong for myself, but in reality, sin was controlling me. I felt the pull of temptation and I *thought* I was 'choosing' what I wanted to do; in reality though, I was a slave to sin and it called the shots. And just like Paul says, I ended up being ashamed of what I did. What seemed desirable and good was actually rotten through and through.

It's like a sticker I saw on someone's car at NoFrills – 'The trouble with trouble is that it starts out fun.' Same with sin – starts out looking good, then it's nothing but trouble. In fact Paul says it leads to death. The wages of sin is death.

But, when we receive the free gift of God, when we trust in Him alone, we die to sin. We are set free from it. We are no longer its slaves and it is no longer our master. As Grant Osborne puts it, sin is "...no longer a power controlling us, only a force tempting us."^{iv}

So what do you do when it comes around? Count yourself dead to it. 12 ...Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God. The Message paraphrase of Romans 6:12-14 puts it well –

12-14 That means you must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives. Don't give it the time of day. Don't even run little errands that are connected with that old way of life. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time—remember, you've been raised from the dead!—into God's way of doing things. Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer. You're living in the freedom of God.

So count yourself dead to sin... and alive to Christ.

There's a neat little phrase in verse 4 that says 'We were buried with him through baptism into death so that, just as Jesus was raised to life, we too may live a new life' (paraphrased from NIV).

If you have trusted in Jesus, then you have a new life to live. You were dead in sin but now alive to Christ. Don't go back to the old way of living, but live in the newness of Christ that He has given you.

What does that look like? What does it mean to be alive to Christ?

It means letting Jesus call the shots and lead you into a life of goodness and holiness. It means being alert to His leading. It means offering your eyes and ears and hands and heart as tools through which He can be a blessing to the world. It means running everything we do and say through the filter of 'is this God-honouring or is this just my old self peeking through?'

Let the knowledge that, spiritually speaking, you have died and risen again with Christ, motivate you to live in ways that honour Him.

The gift of God has set you free; use your freedom to pursue what is good. Count yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ.

BENEDICTION

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

ⁱ Quoted in Marvin Pate, *Romans* (Teach the Text Commentary), OliveTree, under 'Illustrating the Text' for Romans 6:1-7.

ⁱⁱ "[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5 NIV).

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins" (Col 2:13 NIV).

ⁱⁱⁱ Calvin W. Choi, 'Romans,' *The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching*, ed. Kim & Gibson (Baker, 2021), pg 477.

^{iv} Grant Osborne, *Romans* (IVP Commentary), OliveTree, Romans 6:1-14.