

When I was a teenager (yes, that was way back in last century), my parents (in a moment of generous decadence), lashed out and treated us to dinner at “Weise’s” restaurant in Toowoomba. Is anyone here old enough to remember “Weise’s”? (stuff of legends)

And that was the first time I’d ever been to an all-you-can-eat smorgasbord... And it was good quality tucker...

And because it was:

- *good quality tucker;*
- *pretty expensive*

And because I was:

- *a boy;*
- *a teenage boy(at that);*
- *a growing country lad;*
- *a Brumpton*

I felt it was my duty to make sure my parents got their money’s worth...

And I filled my plate up again and again.... And I did my best to keep up with my brother, but I couldn’t do that.

And I felt so sick, and I wanted to do it again...

These days, I can’t bring myself to go to an all-you-can-eat restaurant, because I plate and I’m busted...

But sometimes, even though it’s not good for us, we go to excess – because we feel we can... And that’s the way human nature is: we take a good thing for granted, and we abuse it.

And sometimes we're like that, when it comes to God's grace. And so we get tempted to sin, but we don't always fight against it that much, because "It doesn't really matter – God will forgive me anyway"... *"It's like an endless smorgasbord of grace"*.

But, "If the more I sin, the more grace I receive, does that mean it's **ok** for me to sin, because it's good to receive grace?" And Paul answers this question, and I've done a very careful translation from the Greek (of what Paul said), and this is it:

"Not on your Nelly!!!"

How can we who died to sin still live in it?

....

Died...

Has anyone here ever died? I'm not talking about a near-death experience (*heart stopped and they jump-started you again*) – has anyone here died???

Let me put it another way... Has anyone here been baptised? Because, if you've been baptised, you **have** died...

You see, in baptism, we are baptised, into Christ – into union with Him. We are united with Christ, in His death, **and** in His resurrection.

OK, so if we have died, what does that look like? It doesn't mean that our breathing shut down and our heart stopped pumping...

When you were baptised, you went down, under the water. It's a symbol that you died, and were buried with Christ.

And, provided the person who did the deed, was gracious enough to let you up again before 3 minutes, when you came up out of the water, it was a symbol that you were rising again (with Christ) to life.

But Paul's telling us here, that Baptism is **more** than a symbol. There is something about you, that did actually die, in the whole "coming-to-faith and being-baptised" event... (And if it didn't die, there's something deficient in your conversion experience.)

What he's telling us, is our old self, was crucified with Jesus – not just that sinful part of us – not just that little bit that we don't like – our whole self – our old self. Paul refers to it as "**the body of sin**" – that's what's been crucified with Jesus.

*As John Stott puts it, "what was crucified with Christ was not a **part** of me called my old nature, but the **whole** of me as I was before I was converted."*ⁱ

Now, this is important for us to understand: Before you became a Christian, you were so far gone – you were such "a mess" – you were so (not just influenced by sin but) **ruled** by sin, there was nothing worth saving.

Now, it's not very popular to say something like that today. The popular humanist notion is *"Everybody has some good inside of them. We've just got to find the good in the person and love them for their good, and help them to develop the good, and then the bad – well, we'll work on that."* But that's not the way it is.

In the act of coming to faith in Jesus and in the act of Baptism, our old sinful body, is put to death with Jesus, because we **were** so corrupt.

Alright,,,,, so if we have been united with [Jesus] in a death like His, what does that mean???

1.

Well, firstly, it means that we are no longer slaves to sin.

We **used** to be **ruled** over by sin, because we used to be **slaves** to sin – we were captured by it, and there was no way that we could break free... If we **tried** to do the right thing, we **couldn't**. Our very attitude toward God, was sin itself...

That's how it **used** to be. But not any longer, because we are no longer enslaved to sin.

2.

Secondly, to be united with Jesus, also means we **live with** Jesus. Jesus hasn't left us alone. And being a Christian isn't a dreary, dead experience – how can it be, when the Almighty God – the Author of Life, is living inside of us.

To live with Jesus, is a:

- full life;
- life of love;
- life of power; and it's
- life eternal – there is no death, because we've already died.

3. Thirdly, to be united with Jesus, means just as Jesus died to sin, so do we. Which leads us to the fourth one.

4.

From death to life... **Now** the life Jesus lives, He lives to God. And this is where the rubber hits the road for us: Because we are united with Christ, we also must consider ourselves ^{11...} **dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

V4 set the scene, by giving us an image of walking in **newness of life** – not 'sameness of life'... If we are raised with Christ, we cannot be the same as we once were – our lives are totally **new**.

And to demonstrate this, Paul gives us a commandment. V12 "Don't let sin ^{12...} **reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.**

We **cannot** keep on sinning, V2 said: ^{2...} **How can we who died to sin still live in it?**

Now, how we take that, depends on whether Paul is giving us a command, or whether he's stating a fact. (the problem with posing a rhetorical question):

If he's giving us a command, the command is – "*We Christians should realise that we must not live in sin*" – He's telling us "Don't do it" – "Don't live in sin"

But some folk would argue, "No, this isn't a command – it's a statement of the way things are". – "*We Christians are no longer **able** to live in sin*". In essence, they're telling us "If you find yourself living in sin, you're not a real Christian – because if you **were** a real Christian, it would be **impossible** for you to fall into sin.

*In other words, is "living in sin" a possibility to be avoided, or an **impossibility** to be recognised?*ⁱⁱ

And the way that Paul continues this letter, he leaves us with no doubt, that it's a command. "*We Christians should realise that we must not live in sin*".

BTW, when Paul uses the phrase, "Living in sin", he's not talking about stumbling/tripping-up with occasional wrongdoing. He's talking about embracing a "*lifestyle*" of sin. – It's an *habitual practice of sin, such that one's life could be said to be **characterised** by that sin rather than being characterised by the righteousness of God*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Alright, so as Christians, we must not live a life of sin, whether it be a life of:

- greed
- lust;
- pride;
- worldliness;
- selfishness;
- unforgiveness...

But you might say to me, “Hang on Michael, that reeks of legalism.” ... And I understand that reaction...

Over the last few chapters of Romans, Paul’s been making it **very** clear that we cannot **be** good enough, And so we have to rely on the grace of God. Our own righteousness doesn’t ‘cut-it’, and if I try to make myself right with God by being a very good little boy, I’m going to fail – we need the righteousness of Jesus to be saved... And that’s what he’s been drilling into us, over the last few chapters...

But now Paul’s telling us, “But don’t you go on sinning.” ...

How does that make sense??? Well, something’s changed... And I’ll tell you what’s changed – We **used** to be slaves to sin, but we’re not “slaves to sin” any more. Sin is not our master any more...

*Telling someone who **is** a slave to sin, not to let sin reign, is about as useful as telling a drowning person to swim to shore^{iv}. (they can’t do it) But telling someone who has **died** to sin, not to let sin reign, is like telling someone who has been plucked from the sea, into a life-boat, “Don’t jump overboard”.*

And so, we're talking about "obedience in faithfulness" ... We are saved by the grace of God – He has saved us from sin, so let's not do it anymore... – We honour Him with obedience and righteous living...

So, does this obedience to God happen naturally? Or is it something we have to work at?

Well, the truth is, it's **both.**, only it's not naturally – it's **supernaturally**...

Before we were saved, we didn't care if we obeyed God or not (*you think about joe-blow.... "Oh, I hope I'm pleasing God..." He doesn't care if he's obeying God or not...*)

But Holy Spirit inside of us, makes us **want** to obey God – the Spiritual man has a supernatural urging to walk in the Spirit... And if we don't have an overwhelming desire to obey God, we've got a spiritual problem...

But even so, as we read the Scriptures, we very quickly realise that obedience to God, is something we also have to work at.

- V12 **Don't** let sin reign in your mortal body. That means "Don't give in to following the passions of your worldly desires".
- V13 **Don't** present your members (that's the bits of your body) as instruments (tools) of unrighteousness. (*Be careful little hands what you do*)
Do however, present yourself to God

And **do** present your members (your hands; feet; eyes; ears; tongue) to God as tools of righteousness... As Maxwell Smart would say, *“If only they could be used for good instead of evil...”*

You know what – “obedience” often gets thought of as a burden, but “obedience is coming alive to God. And becoming alive to God, isn’t just something we do in our minds – it’s a whole new **life**. And in life, we don’t just ‘think about things’.... When we become alive to God, our bodies become tools for God.

And praise the Lord, it’s grace that makes this possible... V14&15 tell us that we are not under law – we are under grace....

Now, I reckon 99/100 times I hear that verse quoted (“We are not under law – we are under grace) it gets used (at some level) as an excuse, *“It doesn’t matter so much if I sin.”*... And that’s a complete mis-representation of what Paul’s saying...

We use our bodies for good instead of evil, because we are under grace...

You see:

If we **were** still living “under Law”, every time we stumbled and sinned, it would be a disaster... Under law, I would be deserving of devastating punishment, over and over again. And that’s why under the Old Covenant Law, they would have

to sacrifice animals again and again and again, because every little sin would take them back to square one (sinners, deserving of death)...

But because we are **not** living under law any more – because we are **now** living under grace, the Lord is patient with us.

And when we mess up, we can have every confidence that:

- He **will** forgive us; and
- He **won't** give up on us; and
- He **won't** desert us; and
- He **won't** take His Holy Spirit from us; and

- He **will** continue to refine us; and
- purify us; and
- perfect us...

because that's what it means to live in grace.

But let's never take God's amazing grace for granted. We've died to sin. We can't go on living in it...

Righto, to finish up, I want to make one last point.

For most folk, when they read a passage like this one, it's very easy for us to find ourselves focusing on our failings, and to walk away, with the attitude "I'm not good enough." "I've failed God." "I've been living in sin." – *"That wretched preacher, he's just been telling me to try harder to be a better person."*

But what I want to encourage today, is to come alive to God – to walk in the newness of life, and to experience the freedom that God has given us

Our old self was crucified, so that the body of sin (tools of unrighteousness) would be brought to nothing. God has brought us from death to life, and in this new life, we present ourselves to Him...

- to live for God.
- We commit every part of our body as tools for serving God; and
- When we present ourselves to God as instruments (tools) of righteousness, it's really hard to also be a tool of **un**righteousness.

When The Lord becomes our everything (all-in-all), sin loses its appeal.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
the depth of this passage today is great,
and we've only touched on it.

Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us

- for treating your grace as 'cheap';
- walking in the flesh instead of the Spirit.

- for using our bodies as tools for unrighteousness; and
- for using Your endless grace as an excuse for sinning.

Holy Spirit,
help us to walk in newness of life,
Honouring You, Lord God,
with every part of our body, and
every part of our being.

As we live in Christ, and for Christ,,,
Amen.

ⁱ J. R. W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5–8* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1966), p. 45. [quoted in Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

ⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Turned into a statement, which is the logical equivalent of the rhetorical question, it may be taken in two different ways: (1) “We Christians should realize that we must not live in sin” (a “moral” appeal); or (2) “We Christians are no longer able to live in sin” (a “theological” assertion). In other words, is “living in sin” a possibility to be avoided, or an impossibility to be recognized?

Everything depends on the meaning we give to the phrase “living in sin.” If by this Paul means committing sins, or living at times *as if* sin still reigned, then the first alternative is certainly a possibility. For, to go no further, it is clear from the imperatives in vv. 11–14 that Paul considers sin a continuing and ever-present threat to the Christian. On the other hand, if “living in sin” means existing “in the sphere of” and so “under the lordship” of sin, then the second alternative must be correct; for Paul makes clear that the deliverance from sin’s lordship is a past, unchangeable occurrence (vv. 6, 14, 17–22). The balance between these two is a fine one, but the first appears to be closer to the truth. “Living in sin” is best taken as describing a “lifestyle” of sin—a habitual practice of sin, such that one’s life could be said to be characterized by that sin rather than by the righteousness God requires. Such habitual

sin, “remaining in sin” (v. 1), “living in sin” (v. 2), is not possible, as a constant situation, for the one who has truly experienced the transfer out from under the domain, or tyranny, of sin. Sin’s power is broken for the believer, and this *must* be evident in practice (see also Jas. 2:14–26; and perhaps 1 John 3:6, 9). Yet the nature of Christian existence is such that the believer can, at times, live in a way that is inconsistent with the reality of what God has made him in Christ. It is not sin, but the believer, who has “died,” and sin, as Wesley puts it, “remains” even though it does not “reign.”³¹ Therefore, while “living in sin” is incompatible with Christian existence and impossible for the Christian as a constant condition, it remains a real threat. It is this threat that Paul warns us about in v. 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

^{iv} Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.