

When I was a teenager (yes, that was way back in last century), I can remember a few times, when my parents really lashed out, and we went out to (what I consider to be) a really nice restaurant, up on the Toowoomba range, called “Weise’s”.

Some of you probably remember it, (it’s not there any more)... But it was one of these all-you-can-eat smorgasbords....

And I still remember the first time I ever went there, it was exactly what I pictured heaven might be like... In church, I’d heard about this heavenly banquet, hey... Well, what do you think a growing teenage lad thinks about when he hears about a heavenly banquet???

Now that I’m a bit older, I tend to think of the heavenly banquet as more of the company – of having Jesus there, and basking in the presence and the glory of God..... but back then, I was pretty shallow (I went about as deep as my stomach), and to me, the thought of a heavenly banquet, was all about really nice food, and lots of it...

And so, when I saw the tucker at that place – As I remember it, there were 2 rooms, stacked full of food (with several layers of it). One room full of roasts and fish and vegies (other seafood that I wouldn’t eat – lobster; Moreton Bay Bugs; Prawns; Mud crabs; Sand Crabs), and all sorts of other dishes, that I wouldn’t even bother trying (& salads and stuff)... And then in the other room, it was a room full of deserts: home-made macadamia ice-cream and brandy snaps and chocolate éclairs; cheesecakes; pavlovas; meringues; slices; chocolates; lollies....

Growing teenage boy heaven...

Well, as you can imagine, it was a pretty expensive restaurant... And I knew my Dad had paid a lot of money, for us to be there that night... And when I saw those rooms (full of food), I thought "Right!!! I'm not going to let my dad down. I'm going to try and get his money's worth out of this" ...

So, I got a plate, and I loaded it up, and I ate it all down. And I was full. But then they told me that I could go back again. No, don't take your plate with you – get a clean one. So I loaded up another plate, and I came back, and my dirty plate was gone. ... And I ate that.

You can imagine how the night went, can't you??? I think next trip was to the desert room... And then another trip for main course again. And then some more desert...

And I ate. And I ate. And I ate and I ate.... I tried to keep up with my brother, but I couldn't... I tried so hard to keep up with him. I tried so hard, to get my money's worth out of that tucker....

And I felt so sick. I was so full. Maybe next time I'd do better.

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 knowing human nature as it is, sometimes we do take advantage of a good thing, or more probably, we take a good thing for granted – and we abuse it.

And Christians can be like that, when it comes to God's grace. We get tempted to keep on sinning, because we know God will forgive us "It's like an endless smorgasbord of forgiveness".

– *"I know I **should** be resisting this temptation, but maybe I'll just let it slide this time – God will forgive me" ... After all, that's what grace is about, isn't it?*

Somebody once said *"I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."*ⁱ

Do you know what I'm talking about?

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

"Not on your Nelly!!!"

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

....

Has anyone here ever died? I'm not talking about a near-death experience – has anyone here died???

OK... Has anyone here been baptised? Well guess what? – You **have** died... what was it like?

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? Does it mean that our breathing shut down and our heart stopped beating? No. Alright, well what **does** it look like?

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 here, we are learning that Baptism is **more** than a symbol. There is something about you, that actually died, in the whole “coming-to-faith and being-baptised” event...

We have actually been united – joined together with Christ, in His death.

And this is such that Paul could say that 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, has 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.”ⁱⁱ*

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.

And this is completely contrary to what the world would say. 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 self 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 look like???

1.

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

We **used** to be **ruled** over by sin – we used to be slaves to sin – we were captured by it – we couldn’t break free from it – sin just seemed to have this hold over us, that when 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. We have been set free – 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 Creator of heaven and earth – the Author of Life, is living inside of us.

Jesus said: ^{John 10:10.....} **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full...** And we do. If I'm living a dreary, dead life as a Christian, well I'm missing something. We live with Jesus, and that means a full life; a life of love; a life of power; and life eternal.

3. What else does it mean to be united with Jesus?

Well thirdly, Jesus died to sin

4.

And fourthly, now the life He lives, He lives to God.

And this is where the rubber hits the road for us: We also must consider ourselves

^{11...} **dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

And to demonstrate this, Paul gives us a commandment.

“Don't let sin ^{12...} **reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.**

And so we come back to the original question – “Is it ok to go on sinning, because God is a gracious God, and He’ll forgive us?” **Not on your Nelly** – it’s not.

We **can’t** keep on sinning, ².... How can we who died to sin still live in [sin]?

Now, what we do with that question, depends on whether Paul is giving us a command, or whether he’s stating a fact. There’s 2 ways that we could take this:

The first is as a command – “*We Christians should realise that we must not live in sin*” (a “moral” appeal) – telling us “Don’t do it” – “Don’t live in sin”

And a second way we could take it, is as a statement of the way things are – “*We Christians are no longer **able** to live in sin*” (a “theological” assertion). – telling us “If you find yourself living in sin, you’re not a real Christian – because if you **were** a real Christian – if you truly **believed** in Jesus, 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?* ⁱⁱⁱ

And the way the passage unfolds, leaves no doubt, that it’s a command. “*We Christians should realise that we must not live in sin*”.

“Living in sin” describes a *“lifestyle” of sin*. – It’s a *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^{iv}*.

Alright, so as Christians, we must not live a life of sin...

But is that legalism? ... Over the last few weeks, we’ve just discovered that we can’t **be** good enough – we need God and we need **His** righteousness to be saved... But now we’re being told, “But don’t you go on sinning.” Is that legalism?

No, it’s not, but what’s changed? I’ll tell you what’s changed – We used to be slaves to sin, but we’re not any more. Sin isn’t our master any more...

*Telling someone who is a **slave** to sin, not to let sin reign, is like telling a drowning person to swim to shore^v. 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”.*

So, who is responsible for obedience? Does obedience to God naturally happen? Or is it something we have to work at?

Well, to be true to the Scriptures, we must recognise, that obedience to God, is something we have to work at.

- V12 **Don’t** let sin reign in your mortal body
- Don’t give in to following the passions of your mortal body.

- V13 **Don't** present your members (that's the bits of your body) as instruments of unrighteousness
- **Do** however, present yourself to God
- And **do** present your members (your hands; feet; eyes; ears; tongue) to God as instruments of righteousness

We **absolutely** have a part to play in obedience to God.

But of course, the fact that Jesus is with us – That He lives with us, helps us to achieve what we could never do without Him... ..

And for us to live righteous lives, is now possible, because we are not under law, but under grace. Let me explain that:

If we were still living “under law”, every time we mess up, it would be like when a child spoils a sand-castle – wipe it out and start again... Under law, we would be deserving of punishment, over and over again.

But because we're **not** living under law any more – because we're living under grace, the Lord is patient with us. And when we mess up, we can have every confidence that He'll 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 we're living in grace.

But let's not take that grace for granted. We've died to sin. We can't go on living in sin...

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

For most people, 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." "I've got to try harder to be a better person."....

And I'm not going to deny the validity of some of that...

But what I **really** want for us to do, right now, is to focus on the positive action...

- To walk in the newness of life
- To be free from sin

And as a response to this,

- to live for God.

- If we commit every part of our body to serving God, we're going to be too busy doing good, to do any evil.
- If we start presenting ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness, we're going to find it really hard, to mix that up with being instruments of **un**righteousness.

I guess, what I've always found, is "trying harder and harder to stop sinning", is often less productive, than filling my life; and my day up with God, and worshipping Him, and serving Him.

Questions.

ⁱ *For the Time Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 116 [quoted in Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

ⁱⁱ 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.]

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

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

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