

ALDHAM Sunday 22 June 2008

Readings: Romans 6: 1 - 11

Introduction

It would be a good idea to have a bible open at page 1132.

A great **paradox** of the Christian faith is this: Jesus died to save us from sin. Yet our experience is that even after **we have come to accept** that because Jesus' death we have been saved, **we go on sinning**. If you don't like the word "sinning", then how about these words from the **1662 service of Morning Prayer**:

*"We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done;"*

This **paradox** is recognised in all our services whether ancient or modern. **In this service of the Lord's Supper**, on the one hand we are going to **recall our Lord's death**, and its power to "keep us in eternal life"; on the other hand we have already **"confessed that we have sinned"**.

So, we believe that through a faith in the death of Jesus we are **freed to be brought into God's Family**, or if you like, into God's Kingdom; yet our experience is that God's family is **full of sinners, including, especially, me**.

Confused?

Paul, whose conversion experience and acceptance of the salvation offered by the risen Jesus was absolutely genuine. To Timothy he wrote:

*1TI 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying ...: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I **am** the chief (KJV)*

Not *was*.

This business of **not being able to stop himself** from letting his Lord down, was **frustrating** to him in the extreme. In the chapter after our reading in Romans:

ROM. 7: 15 For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

So if we feel the same inadequacy from time to time, we are in a sense in good company!

So how do we **explain** this paradox? More importantly, **how do we live with it?**

Exploitation?

The people Paul was writing to had an idea. This was to **exploit** it. **Page 1132:**

*RO 6:1 What shall we say, then? **Shall we go on sinning** so that **grace may increase?***

We need to understand the **context** of this verse - where it comes in the letter to the Romans. **Where have the first 5 chapters brought us?**

Because this letter is not addressing problems in a particular church, Paul is more than usually systematic.

In **chapters 1 to 3**, Paul starts with the **Bad News**. He writes of the **wrath of God** -- that is the **justifiable anger** of a righteous God in the face of the **godless world** of the day.

Do you ever wonder what God must feel about the atrocities we hear about nightly on the news?

Paul says that our God is a **God who reveals himself** as a **righteous** God, one way or another. He has revealed himself through the **history** of Israel, through the **prophets** (OT), through **nature**, and through his **Word (that is Jesus)**.

He acts in judgement against those who deliberately reject him.

In **chapter 3 v. 21** he moves onto the **Good News**. This God of Judgement is also a God full of **Grace - undeserved goodness**.

Trying to keep the Law **won't do**, because we can't. [3:23] He gives **Abraham** as an example: it **wasn't his good work** that justified him, **but his faith**. [4:1-3]

[3: 24] **By faith we are set free from sin** by the **redemption** that came by Christ Jesus. Jesus paid the penalty of our sin instead of us. He went to the pawn shop and paid the price we should pay for our disobedience.

Then in chapter 5, Paul writes of the peace that this brings. Unmerited reconciliation (peace).

As **Charles Wesley** put it in the Christmas hymn "Hark the herald angels sing": **God and sinners reconciled**.

It is a change of **status**. If a child is adopted into a good family, his or her **status** changes at the moment of adoption. **But it can take years before the status of adoption makes a difference to the child**.

So chapters 1 to 5 are concerned with **the change in status** that can only be brought about by faith in the death of Jesus.

We often call this change of status "Conversion". For some of us, it will have been an **event**, for others a **process**. Some **may yet have to experience** such a change of status. Some **know the moment**; others know that this change of status has happened, but not when. **It doesn't matter**.

Back to Chapter 6 - page 1132

RO 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

It's not hard to read between the lines of verse 1. Paul is responding to his **critics**, people who we might even recognise as **born-again Christians**, people who have the status of **having been reconciled to God**, but who have **gone no further**. Apparently they are known as "**antinomians**".

Their argument was this: at **conversion** or at the first coming to faith in Jesus **we are freed once and for all from the guilt of sin**. This is made possible only by **God's grace**. If, in this state, I now **continue to sin** God will continue to **lift from me the guilt of further sin**, because Jesus died **once and for all** for the sins of all people. His mercy is **infinite**. Therefore his Grace will be even more abundant.

Therefore, the more I sin, the more grace is extended to me.

I'm sure none of us take that view.

Death to sin?

Paul's response is in verse 2. **We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?**

What does this mean? "**We died to sin**"? It's crucial to what Paul is saying.

Incidentally, the words death and die occur 14 times in the 11 verses of the Epistle

reading. We can't just sweep this difficult idea under the carpet.

John Stott (1994):

I confess that, ever since I became a Christian fifty-six years ago, I have enjoyed what could be termed a 'love-hate' relationship with Romans, because of its joyful-painful personal challenges. It began soon after my conversion, with chapter 6 and my longing to experience that 'death to sin' which it seemed to promise. I toyed for many years with the fantasy that **Christians are supposed to be as insensitive to sin as a corpse is to external stimuli.**

It wasn't until I was invited to give the Keswick Convention 'Bible Readings' on Romans 5 – 8 in 1965, that I understood what it meant.

John Stott was concerned in the same way as Paul is concerned that he **did not feel insensitive** to sin.

When Paul writes in his letters about **sin**, and the **consequences** he tends to use the words “**die**” and “**death**” in a kind of **legal** sense rather than a **biological** sense. It's the context of a **legal penalty**. Nothing to do with the end of biological life.

In Chapter 1 [1:32], *the godless, ... who do such evil things. deserve death.*

And later in chapter 6

The wages of sin in death. [Rom 6:23]

He is **not** talking about **Capital Punishment**. The penalty is not actually spelt out. But it is strongly suggested in the Bible that it's **the opposite of Eternal Life**.

So, when he writes in [v.2] *We died to sin* it's in the **Past tense**. The penalty **has been paid**. By Jesus. Our **status has changed**. But that is not all there is to it. Look at verse 4.

A new Creation

We have been saved **in order to live a new life**. The **purpose of our new status** [v.4] is that

we too may live a new life

We have been saved to live a **new** life. As that lovely swinging song says,

I am a new creation,

No more in condemnation,

Here in the grace of God I stand.

So Paul is rightly **dismissive** of his critics. [v.2]

how can we live in sin - or go on living in sin - any longer?

That, he says, does not bear logical analysis. It's **this new life** that chapter 6 is all about.

If there is one thing that Richard should be remembered for, it is **his insistent preaching, especially in recent months, on what it is that we have been saved**

for. The **status** we enjoy **through faith in the sacrifice that Jesus made was never intended as an end in itself.** The end that we have been saved for, has often been described by Richard, and others, as **Discipleship.** A more technical and rather scary term is Sanctification. We should thank Richard, as I do now, for this emphasis and for his persistence in preaching on it.

So the rest of what I have to say should sound familiar, or at least be on a familiar theme!

United with Christ in Baptism, death and resurrection.

The rest of this chapter explores this **new life**, the life for which we have been saved and set apart.

Paul pictures it as a life that is **united with Christ** in **three** specific contexts:

- **Baptism into Christ**[vv.3-4]
- **Resurrection with Christ** [vv.5 -7]
- **Life in Christ** [vv.8-10]

1. Baptism and Death

In the NT, the rite of **Baptism** in water is always closely associated with **Conversion**, which it follows. It is an outward sign of the new faith and the **change of status** in the person being baptised. What we call **total immersion** certainly represents the washing away of the guilt of sin. But **the going under and the coming up represent death and resurrection.** Paul says we have been **baptised INTO Christ** and **INTO his death.** In other words we identify with Jesus' death.

What does this mean? We've had many baptisms at Family Services in this church, but **seldom is death mentioned!**

Paul at v.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.

Why bring death into baptism? What has termination to do with initiation?

We're back to the **New Life** again. The New Life can only begin for those who have had the guilt and penalty of sin dealt with **by the death of Jesus and confirmed by his resurrection.**

In other words this New Life **is actually prescribed** for those who have undergone **conversion** of one sort or another.

2. The New Life

Paul says this New Life is characterised by

- Living in Christ [v.8], or being alive to Christ [v.11]
- Being **united with Christ in his Resurrection** [v.5].

Being in Christ, being alive to Christ is

- **living in the presence of Jesus.** Will Jesus come with me?
- **consulting with Jesus** - listening to Jesus through prayer and what we know of him in the Gospels.

- **living on an eternal timescale.** We thought about this last time I was up here. The wisdom of God takes into account the eternal perspective.
- **asking the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ** to infect our minds and our hearts and show in our life style.

It means dealing with **the biggest threat to being in Christ** in my life. What is that? It's ME. However the ME in me manifests itself.

A Sunday school teacher was trying to assess where her children were in their understanding of recent lessons. So she asked: "**What do you have to do to go to heaven?**"

"You have to keep your **bedroom very tidy**," said one girl with her hand up.

"Yes, well that's important but it not enough."

A boy put his hand up. "You have to **help mummy and daddy** when they give you jobs to do."

"Yes, but that's still not enough."

Another hand went up. "You have to **read your Bible and pray**."

"That's very important indeed. But that's not sufficient either."

There were no more hands up. There was silence for a few moments. Then a small boy put his hand up. "**You have to be dead!**"

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.

Iain MacCallum