

What Do We Do With Our Sin?

Week 7 of Series Romans 3-8

Romans 6:1-14

Ethan Ezikian

I. Introduction

We're continuing our series in the book of Romans, so if you haven't turned there already I'd love for you to grab a bible and get your eyes on Romans 6:1-14. And while you turn there, let me try and orient us in the right direction. Here's the question that's been resonating with me this week in my study: What do we do with our sin?

This week I heard a song that, honestly, made me angry. It made me angry because it was a song written for Christian radio and it was not only bad art, but bad theology! There's a whole rant about supposedly Christian music there that I need to be careful not to let out right now, because it just wouldn't be helpful. But with this song the lyrics were something along the lines of, "I'm a champion for God... I'm a warrior for God... I'm not afraid... If I have doubts I'm just gonna pray harder and they'll go away" And I'm standing there - this was in the context of a worship service kind of setting - thinking, *don't put those words in my mouth!* Because they felt like a total mischaracterization of what it really feels to be a Christian. In my life as a follower of Jesus I can point to a handful of "mountain top" moments where God felt so near to me that I would have told you I could walk in victory for the rest of my life, but honestly, friends, those moments are not my day in day out experience. Most days I don't feel like a doubt-crushing, warrior, champion for God. Most days, in one way or another I fall short of the standards I have set for myself, let alone God's standards for me.

Isn't that the human experience? To live with a disappointing level of weakness, and to struggle relationally so that we hurt others even when we don't intend to, and to battle with the warring factions of our inward desires constantly doing that which we do not want to do and leaving undone the things we want to do. The non-Christian world would say that to err is to be human and the only way to find peace in a world full of our shortcomings is to train our hearts to simply be content with a certain level of disappointment and failure. But the real Christian gospel doesn't allow us to just numb our hearts to its disappointment and sorrow. It actually says there is hope for growth, and victory, and wholeness and that hope begins with a correct diagnosis of the human experience. The Christian gospel says the root of all of our sorrow, disappointment, warring desires, relational strife, and more is sin. Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, it's rebelling against him by living without reference to him, it's not being or doing what he's commanded us. And since Adam and Eve sin has fractured the cosmos and infected the human heart so that our very natures are bent away from the good of knowing, loving, and obeying God. You and I don't just do sinful things, we are sinful people.

So what do we do with sin? Even for followers of Jesus; we believe Jesus died and rose again to kill it, yet it rises like the undead out of our hearts. Intentional and unwitting. Active and passive. Like Hydra in Greek mythology, we cut off one head and two more appear. In a world where we are dogged by our own idolatrous hearts, how can we hope for change? How can we have strength to

fight the marathon-war with sin? How can we hope to exchange failure, disappointment, and weariness for joy? How can we hold out the hope of the gospel to the world?

That's the question Paul is answering here in Romans 6. **What does the Christian do with sin? We recognize our Union with Christ and we live as if it's true.**

Pray with me... *God our Father, every good and perfect gift comes from you. And to meditate on your word and understand its teaching for our lives is among the greatest goods. So we need your help to see and understand the gospel. Help us, Holy Spirit, for our good and for the glory of Christ. Amen.*

II. Recognize Our Union

Paul begins Romans 6 asking a question:

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Now, in Romans Paul has been preaching a gospel that says our good works and our moral efforts cannot contribute to our salvation. The only way that you can be right with God is by grace through faith and that grace comes only through Jesus Christ. And just before chapter six Paul makes such a radical statement about God's grace that it's prone to misunderstanding. In 5:20 he said, "...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..." In the Greek it more literally reads, "where sin abounded, Grace super-abounded." There is no sin, Paul says, that can outpace the grace of God in Christ!

Now, God's radical grace to us can be misunderstood in at least two ways. If you're a moralist, you hear that and skeptically think, "Surely not! Surely our works matter. My holy living, my religious fervor, my feelings of closeness with God - those have got to be keeping me in God's favor!" And Paul has spent chapters telling the moralist, "By no means. Your works don't contribute one bit to your salvation." But there's an opposite misunderstanding of God's grace that says, "If God's grace superabounds where sin abounds, if all my sin serves to put God's grace on glorious display, then maybe I can keep sinning so that God can keep glorifying himself by being gracious to me!" And Paul is correcting that error here. Look at verse 1&2 again:

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means!

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

In other words, the only way you can conclude that God's grace would allow you to sin all the more is if you misunderstand what happens to a person when they believe the gospel. And the thing that happens when we believe the gospel is that we've died with Christ.

We've Died with Christ

Paul repeats a version of that truth six times in the passage for today.

- Verse 2: "we died to sin"
- Verse 3: "we have been baptized into Christ's death"
- Verse 4: "we were buried with him, into death"
- Verse 5: "we have been united with him in death"
- Verse 6: "our old self was crucified with him"
- Verse 8: "we have died with Christ"

One thing that has been clear as we've worked our way through Romans is that death is the natural and right consequence for sin. Sin leads to death. Not just physical death, but the spiritual death of separation from God because of his righteous wrath for sin. And this is why it's the biggest news in the universe that at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly (5:6). Jesus did not die for his own sins! He was perfectly obedient to the Father; completely and utterly without sin. Jesus died for the ungodly. The penalty we deserved for our sin had been paid by Christ in his death on the cross.

And what we need to understand is that the cross of Jesus Christ isn't wonderful merely because an innocent one stepped in to take the punishment that the guilty ones deserved. The cross is wonderful for you, Christian, because Christ has actually united you to himself. He has so closely identified himself with you that he didn't just take the punishment you deserved, he took your sin itself. And because your sin is not just actions you've perpetrated, but your rebellion against God woven into your nature Paul says, it's not just your sin that was nailed to the cross. It's not just your guilt that has died.. Look at what he says in verse 6: ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing. That means that for every Christian, there is an old self that has been crucified with Christ. An old self that lived in bondage to sin like an indentured servant who is obligated to obey its master. But in the gospel, that old self died. And in dying, you were set free from your indentured servitude to sin. Your covenant with your old master sin was rendered null and void. And more than that, a new self has been raised with Christ.

Raised With Christ

Look at verse 5:

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now that word "united" is really important. In the Greek it has the sense of being grafted into the root. In fact it hearkens back to the words of Jesus in John 15: "I am the vine and you are the branches." Paul is saying we have become united to Christ like a branch that is grafted into a vine. Think about that picture! A branch grafted in becomes a part of the vine, it receives its life from the vine, the cells of its stalk are knit to the cells of the vine. They become one thing! In other words, the gospel isn't just transactional. It's transformational. God makes a new person out of you and he does it by grafting you into Jesus. Our life has been inserted into the very roots of his life. We have been united to Jesus Christ. His past is our past. His future is our future. Colossians 3 says, *"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* See how we are identified with him? You have died with him. You are raised in him. You are seated at the right hand of God in him.

Tim Keller says it's like there was a person who, through their own skill and hard work became incredibly wealthy. Now how did riches come to this person? Through their brilliance and effort. But then the rich person gets married. How do their riches go to their spouse? Through their union! That's what has been done for you in your union to Jesus!

The Father looks at the Son and his heart bursts with delight, and approval, and love. And the text is saying that everything that Christ has done is now how he sees you. He looks at you as free from condemnation for your sins. He looks at you as victorious over the grave. He considers you to be his

as Christ is his. This is how Paul can say in Ephesians 1, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...**” You didn’t just get a “get out of jail free” card. You didn’t just get a pardon. You were united to the sacrificial death and conquering victory of Christ. You are completely identified with him! And because this new life is “hidden with Christ in God” that means it is totally secure. It can never be taken away from you. Your new position as a delighted in, raised to life, son or daughter of God the Father is unbreakable and totally secure. Because who you are in Christ is not dependent on you, it's dependent on Christ!

So when we consider our sin we are so prone to fall into those two ditches of legalism or license. To say, even as followers of Jesus, my relationship with God is dependent on the degree to which I can behave *OR* I might as well sin all the more, because God’s grace covers my sin. But both legalism and license distort and dishonor Christ. Legalism makes Christ unnecessary, license disfigures him because those who say they are “in him” falsely reflect his righteous life, but the gospel says to both of those errors, “By no means! You are a new person in Christ!”

And as Christians, when we look at our failure and our weakness - the ways we fall short of even our own standards. When we look at our lives and see all the ways that we are unfaithful or unimpressive. All the ways we struggle more than find victory... And we wonder... is there any hope for change? Is there any hope for wholeness? Is there any hope for joy in this life? Is there any hope for me and for this church full of failures like me to share the gospel with the world... The answer to all of our longings and our doubts is that at the very foundation of who you are, your identity is not that you are enslaved to sin. The core of who you are has been united to Jesus Christ and your life is hidden with his life and he will never die again, so your life hidden with him is unassailable.

What does a Christian do with sin? You recognize what is most true about you - you have died with Christ and you have been raised to new life with him.

III. “What About Me?”

Now, that truth about your Union with Christ is meant to lift your soul! And it should! But for some of us, it might throw you into turmoil because there’s a whisper inside you asking, *If a Christian is someone who has died to sin and walks in newness of life does that mean that because I still sin all the time I’m not truly a Christian?* No. That’s not what that means. It’s important to get clear what Paul doesn’t mean when he says, “You have died to sin.” Being dead to sin does not mean that sin has no more power of influence over us. Otherwise Paul wouldn’t have to write verses 12-13 where he basically says, *don’t let sin reign, don’t present yourselves to sin*. If true Christians were no longer influenced by sin, why would Paul have to write that?

But here is what is true about you when you die to sin with Christ: the moment you become a Christian, the sin that ruled over you was stripped of its dominion. You are no longer under its reign.

Back in Romans 1, Paul said that apart from Christ we are given over to our sinful desires. In chapter 5 he’s making the point that sin reigns in the human heart, but now in Christ grace reigns. In Colossians 1 Paul teaches that we were living in another kingdom, in the dominion of darkness, but

Christ has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. (Col 1:13).

An illustration that Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave might be helpful here. Imagine a kingdom where, for all of history, one class of people ruled over another class. They were allowed to enslave them and oppress them in any way they liked and whenever a person from the higher class met a person from the lower class they could order them to do anything they wanted and the lower class people would have no choice but to obey. For as long as anyone could remember, they lived like that. But then one day a good king came to the throne and finally said, "No more! All people in the kingdom are free and equal. One class cannot rule over another ever again." And his decision was irrevocably written into the laws of the kingdom. Well now if someone from the oppressive group meets someone from the oppressed group on the road and gives them an order, do they have to obey? No! The dominion of the oppressors has been taken away from them. And yet... how many generations would it take for the oppressed group to be freed from the impulse to cringe and obey? That is the battle we fight with sin.

Your Union with Christ means that God has declared sin no longer reigns over you. You no longer live in a kingdom ruled by your sinful desires. In Christ, you have been transferred in a new kingdom. Now, we're waiting for the day when we will return and we will know the power of his resurrection fully and finally. So right now it's like sin is an evil army that occupied a country and has been overthrown and even though they've been cast out of the capitol city, they can still hide like a guerilla army in the bush. So the wicked forces of sin can still impose their will and create havoc for the new government, but it can never get back into power. Because you have died with Christ you are free to resist sin.

IV. Live As If It's True

Recognizing what is true about us in Christ - our union with Him - is irreplaceable. It's the source of our hope and it is unassailable and unbreakable. And for Paul, the natural outworking of knowing our union with Christ is that we should live as if it were true. This is what he's getting at in verse 11 where he says, "11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Now, if our union with Christ is eternally secure, why do we need to count ourselves or reckon ourselves or consider ourselves to be something that we already are in Christ? It's just like the emancipated slave who meets his former master on the road and obeys out of ingrained habit. Lloyd-Jones said,

"...You can still be a slave experientially even when you are no longer a slave legally... Whatever you may feel, whatever your experience may be, God tells us here, through his word, that if we are in Christ we are no longer... under the reign of sin... and if I fall into sin, as I do, it is simply because I do not realize who I am... Realize it! Reckon it!"¹

We have been given the rights of freedom from sin in the gospel, but we often don't lay hold of the rights our union with Christ affords us.

¹ Lloyd-Jones quoted by Keller in *Romans for You*, 144

Just a few weeks ago I had a chance to attend a conference for pastors and I heard an older pastor say these words, “When I was a young pastor, I knew that I needed to be violent toward the sin of lust; and I was. But I wish that I had practiced the same violence toward the sin of self pity.”² And that week the Lord opened my eyes to the fact that I had been nurturing the sin of self pity in my life for months. Everything from legitimate heartache, to mild annoyances I had been storing up in a little bank of selfish bitterness and I used it justify my anger and impatience and to lick my wounds and to cultivate unforgiveness and to complain to God about my disappointments. And before that pastor said those words and I was cut to the heart, I was unbreakably united to Christ, and yet I was living like a slave to my self-centeredness. So then after my eyes were opened to that sin in my life, what then? Well... sometimes I still find myself living as if I’m a slave to it. But other times, and hopefully more and more, when I recognize my heart slipping into sinful self pity, I can resist it and attack it by praying to God for help, remembering my identity in Christ, my calling from Christ, practicing gratitude for the gospel. Calling on my community to help me in the fight. I’m free in Christ to make war on my sinful heart, because I have died with him and now I can walk in newness of life. So we have to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God because unless we live as if this great privilege is true, we won’t see it realized in our daily lives.

This is why the final verses in our passage are exhortations to faithfulness: ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

V. Conclusion

We need to land the plane. But did you notice in verse 14, Paul shifts his language. All of a sudden he brings up the law again. We would expect him to simply say, “sin will have no dominion over you, since you are...under grace.” But he instead says, “sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law, but under grace.” There will be more to say about that in upcoming sermons, but for today, we have to take this as one more reminder from Paul that the moral code of the law is not a system of salvation. It only serves to expose our sin, not to free us from it.

And so here, as we come to the end of remembering our Union with Christ, and we hear this exhortation from Paul, “don’t let sin reign in your mortal body... present yourself to God” we’re being given another reminder not to distort God’s grace into a system of self-righteousness where we obey to be accepted. Instead we’re reminded again, you are under grace.

That means, friends, that your obedience, your living into your Union with Christ is fueled not by fear or guilt or shame, but by the gift of salvation that is already given to in Christ.

If you are in Christ, you have been bought with Christ’s blood. You have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and into his God’s kingdom. Christ has delivered you so that you might walk in the newness of life as an instrument of his righteousness.

² John Piper, 2024 Coram Deo Conference

It's this good news that gives us hope for change. It's our union with Christ that gives us assurance of growth and wholeness. It's this gospel of grace that we offer to the world.

And if you're not a Christian, it's the gospel that's offered to you in Christ now. Let's pray.