

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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11/30/2025

Sermon Title: “Shall We Continue in Sin?”

Sermon Text: Romans 6:1-10

Rom. 6:1 ¶ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Rom. 6:2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Rom. 6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Rom. 6:4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Rom. 6:5 ¶ 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.

Rom. 6:6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Rom. 6:7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Rom. 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Rom. 6:9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

Rom. 6:10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

Main Point: The Christian is given a new identity in Jesus Christ – one that has been freed from sin and is now set against a life of sin and death.

Outline:

1. Sin Has Been Broken
2. Sin is Contrary to Christ
3. Sin Contradicts our New Life

Introduction

My best friend and I, when we were in college, would go to coffee places around Phoenix and we would sit outside and lay a bible on the table and drink copious amounts of coffee and have excited conversations. People would come by, sit down, and visit with us. And there was a kid one time who said to us, “You guys are just here trying to get us to become republicans.”

We were like, “When did we ever talk about politics or voting?”

He said, “I can just tell. You guys are trying to get people to believe in absolute truth and God, and I know where that leads. You guys are trying to get me to stop being gay.”

So in this guy’s case, he wasn’t really taking what we had to say seriously. He was imagining things he didn’t like that he thought would happen if he agreed with us, and he didn’t like what he saw as the implications of the gospel. And so he reduced what we were saying to politics and moralism.

Now, here’s the thing: he was right in one sense: he instinctively knew that if he were to believe – I mean really believe in Christ – that the rest of his life wouldn’t be able to stay the same. And so while the gospel is not (first and foremost) about changing voting patterns or cleaning up a person’s life so that now they can have peace with God (that’s putting the moralistic cart before the horse), Paul does want us to know today... there is something in the gospel that unavoidably touches the way we live, and the way we feel, and the way we think about ourselves.

Last week, we saw that our only hope is in not having Adam as our head. Instead, Paul belabored this: the only federal head who can give us life is Christ. And the

concluding word before our reading today was Paul saying this: “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:20-21).

And that leads us this week to a very important question that any of Paul’s readers should already be asking: “Wait a minute: what is my relationship to sin, now that I have Christ as my head instead of Adam?”

Now, Paul knows that all of his readers still experience the effects and realities of sin in an ongoing way. He’s going to take us to that in Romans 7. But the question Paul is answering first is, what should we think and feel about that ongoing battle? What is the truth about it?

There is also another issue here. Today’s passage is an answer to a misunderstanding that Paul is very concerned is being used to slander the gospel. And it’s a slander that (for example) continues to be put forward against Protestants by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Paul’s opponents (then *and* today) think that if we are justified by faith alone, apart from works, then there won’t have a motivation to obey God. They think that the only thing that can really motivate someone to obey is if you tell them, “You must be good, so that you can have peace with God.” They think justification has to be dangled as the motivational carrot. They think that if God justified someone apart from works, then what could there possibly be to motivate works, then?

The truth is, in the gospel, God gives us the carrot. He doesn’t dangle it. He gives us justification as a gift. But these were objections that the Reformers got from the Roman Catholics, and they are accusations that Christians will always face whenever and wherever people hear us preaching the gospel.

Now, on the one hand, I find it comforting that the same charges that were leveled against Paul’s theology still get leveled against our theology. It confirms for me that we are in fact getting the Gospel right. But I also know this means that we should care about answering this question as much as Paul does here in this passage.

So we've basically got two important questions here: *should* we sin? And the second question is, if we shouldn't sin, then *why* shouldn't we if we can be justified apart from works? What drives or motivates our good works if God gives us peace with him apart from them? If we don't have the carrot of justification to chase with our good works, then what is the point of good works?

Paul gives us three reasons why we should not continue in sin today.

1. Sin Has Been Broken (who has been buried and died with Jesus)

The first reason that Paul gives us why we should not continue in sin is that sin has been broken.

This is immediately where Paul goes. Look how he answers the question, "Should we continue in sin"? Verse 2:

"By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" So no question about the conclusion. The gospel absolutely does not lead to the conclusion that we should sin.

Why? First, he says, we died to sin. What does he mean by that? Paul means that something has really happened to us at a fundamental level because we are in Christ. Believers have died to sin.

Theologian John Murray puts it this way: "What the apostle has in view is the once-for-all definitive breach with sin which constitutes the new identity of the believer." (Murray, 213).

We have had a breach with sin. We've been broken from it.

Paul uses the illustration of death to make this point. The most stark, final, dramatic break that can happen to us is death. I am sure that most of us in this room have experienced death in some way. Once a loved one dies, they are gone from our life. And you perhaps know the experience, I'm sure, of the emptiness and finality that settles on us when that happens to us when a loved one has died.

That is how Paul illustrates this definitive break that has happened between us and sin. Paul is saying, we aren't who we used to be. We've been fundamentally changed because we are in Christ now.

Paul says, there has been a fundamental break in the relationship to sin that Christians have. Before: we lived with it, we served it, we loved ourselves, we didn't really care what God thought. We weren't concerned with what pleased God. Our conscience was perhaps troubled, but we were willing to go against it. But now, because we have died to sin, there is a battle within that wasn't there before. Now, we want to see sin defeated in our lives in a way we didn't before.

That doesn't mean that sin has been totally eradicated from our lives yet. The remnants of sin still remain, but the battle has begun.

And so when Paul says we have died to sin, he's saying that for the Christian, the focus of our lives is no longer on ourselves but on Christ. It is a total re-orientation of our life and everything that we orbit around now. Before, we were the center; now Christ is the center. And when we do focus on ourselves and forget Christ, Paul's argument is that we are not living in step with who we really are. We're still living like we haven't died.

Now, this is very important. [I want to put big flashing lights around this point:] Paul is not just being *aspirational* here. He's not telling us to wish and hope to one day be dead to sin.

He is saying something that is really true of us. And it's where believing the gospel is so important. He's calling us to live in step with what is true.

Paul is not telling us to put sin to death. He is telling us that it has already been put to death. We will talk about this more next week as we continue with Paul's argument, but when we sin, the truth is, this isn't us. This isn't who we are. Again, we're going to go deeper on this next Sunday.

But for now, Paul says we should not continue in sin because sin in us has been broken.

2. Sin is Contrary to Christ (whom we are united to)

The second reason that Paul gives us why we should not continue in sin is that sin is contrary to Christ.

Look at verse 5 of our passage today. Paul very explicitly connects our union with Christ with Christ's own death. "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

There are two parts to this, right? The first part, which I want to focus on at the moment is death. He's saying we've been united with him in his death.

Paul frequently does this: he tells us we have died, and he makes sure we know who we died with. When Jesus died, we died, and someone new has come forth in our lives. So look at just two places where Paul does this:

- In Colossians 3, Paul 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. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you..." Paul uses the same "you have died" language, grounding our present holiness in a past and present, definitive reality: something that's really and already true.
- Here's another. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me..." Christ lives in me. Christ was crucified. I'm united to the crucified one. I'm united to the dead man. Therefore, Paul says, "I'm a dead man, too. That means I don't serve that dead man anymore."

The 19th century Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge says this about today's passage: "Such is the nature of the believer's union with Christ, that his living in sin is not merely an inconsistency, but a contradiction in terms, [like speaking] of a live dead man, or a good bad one." (Hodge, p. 191)

We saw earlier how important union with Christ is to Paul. Here Paul uses this concept to answer this serious objection to the gospel. You see, it's not just that the old man died, but it's that we've been united to someone who is precious and holy and good, and of purer eyes than to look on evil.

When you are tempted to sin, ask yourself: what if Jesus Christ was with you right now: would you still go through with this thing you're considering? That thought really ought to stop us in our tracks. Paul seems to be appealing to that sense of Christ's ongoing presence with us as a reason not to sin. The motivation isn't that we don't sin because we're afraid. It's because we're with the one we love.

Paul is, in a sense, doing that here: you've been united to Christ. With whatever you're about to do, are you about to unite Christ to sin? Paul sees this as a powerful motivator toward holy living.

3. Sin Contradicts our New Life

The third reason that Paul gives us why we should not continue in sin is that sin contradicts our new life.

Remember what I said about verse 5. Again, Paul said, "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

Let's focus on this second part. We weren't just united to him in his death. We aren't dead men any longer. He says, the old man died when Christ died, but we have something better in its place: resurrection life. That's how he grounds what he says in verse 4: "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, we too might walk in newness of life."

This is not about what is not here anymore, it's about the new that has come in. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Notice, all of this is God saying what is true, not merely what we should hope for or strive for. If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. Period. If you have an old life of shame, that's not you anymore. That life is dead. If you have things you wish you hadn't done, it's not just that God forgives you in Christ, but that the person who did those things is dead, and you are a new person now.

Those things you did? They don't define you. They aren't you anymore, Paul says. There may be consequences that linger, but God no longer holds your sin against you. You are his new creation now through faith in Christ.

I mentioned this before, but those old remnants of sin do still cling to us. God's people know the battle against flesh and spirit in this life. Galatians 5:17: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh... to keep you from doing the things you want to do." This is an ongoing battle, even for someone who does have the Spirit of Christ. The battle goes on.

Paul laments in Romans 7 that sin is still sadly a part of our existence, and we do despise it. He gives voice to many of us when he says, “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Paul had an old man. Paul’s old man was put to death in Christ. But his battle with sin was life-long (as it will continue to be for all of us).

Church history tells us that Paul was executed just outside of Rome. Because he was a citizen he was beheaded instead of tortured. But from the moment Paul was rescued by Jesus on the road to Damascus, until the moment the blade of the sword came down on his neck, he knew what it meant to have to do battle against the old man, the old nature.

But once that blade fell and Paul’s life in this world ended, his battle with sin was over. This is why John can say something like this: “we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). It’s why Paul can so hopefully say this: “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

It is one of the great hopes of the gospel, that one day we really will experience the last vestiges of our sin destroyed, never to rear its ugly head again.

Fundamentally, Paul is telling all of us: sin is bound to happen in the life of a believer until we are finally glorified and changed in the twinkling of an eye. But when we were in Adam, sin was like breathing. It was natural.

But Paul is telling us here, now that we are in Christ that isn’t true anymore. Now, sin is like a home invader. He keeps coming in; he keeps messing up the place, even though this isn’t his place anymore. When he comes in, we have to tell it that Christ is the owner of this home now. You’re messing up Jesus’ place.

Sin is not who we are anymore. It may happen in our hearts but it is not us anymore. There is a battle going on.

We will be dwelling on this battle between the new and the old man quite a bit as we look at Romans 6 and 7. So you won’t hear the last of this topic today, but I’m often struck by how crucial the gospel is for our everyday life as believers.

How do we think about temptation when it arises? Part of Paul's answer is, it's a foreign invader. And because of this, Luther often would say, you should see all temptation as demonic attack, and you should answer Satan with the gospel. Here is how he put it:

“So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is, there I shall be also!’”

We do need to learn the fine art of answering temptation with the gospel. By doing what Paul does here and fighting sin and temptation by telling ourselves and telling our sin the truth: you aren't natural to me. You don't belong here. You are a parasite. Love of self, temptation to indulge the self, temptation to disobey God... this is foreign to me. Get out, invader. Get out. I have a greater love and a greater master now. My soul is God's territory now. In the name of Christ, go away!

And in Christ, nothing I just said is aspirational. Every word of that is absolutely true.

Conclusion

Usually the way we frame this sort of question is very important but also revealing. Some want to frame it like this: “*Should we sin? Can we sin?*”

The way we ask this question exposes our goals and what we really want.

Maybe you can see this by now, but even the question “Can I sin?” is very revealing, because it's a question built around the desire to do life my own way, and trying to have life God's way *and* my way. Can't I have both? Can't I serve both masters? Well Jesus says no. Can't I have my cake and eat it too? Paul says no. But think about how even the question reveals your real commitments.

It's like a man getting married and saying, “What can I do with other women and still technically stay married?” If a friend asked me that question, I'd be like, “What is going on in your marriage that you would ask that kind of question?” But many

people approach God this way: “what can I do and still technically be saved, or technically get into heaven?”

Paul’s answer to this whole question is to get underneath and probe at where the question is coming from to begin with: are you in Christ? Have you been justified? Have you died to sin or not?

And so his whole approach to sin here is to tell you: this is who you *are*. Stop being who you are not. And so my application here is very straightforward: have you been united to Christ by faith, or not? If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ... if you’ve been born again... if that fundamental break with sin has happened to you... then the call here is not to start living *as if* it is true. It’s to live in keeping with what is *already* true.

Let’s pray.