

How do we relate to sin?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 March 2018

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, today we're going to continue our study on Romans and we're going to look at the first half of chapter 6. We can just read again verses 11 to 14. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey its passions. 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. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law, but under grace.

Now, as we've been saying throughout our study over recent months, the great theme of Romans is the Gospel. Paul is explaining how the good news of Jesus Christ works. And in the first five chapters of this letter, he's presented us with some wonderful teaching regarding how the Gospel works. He started by explaining the problem and he shows that humanity has rejected their Creator. Humanity has rebelled against God and we are therefore sinners. We are ungodly, we are unrighteous. And the consequences of that are devastating.

We are provoking God's wrath and we are leaving ourselves liable to judgment. Paul makes it very, very clear that the good news is in the context of bad news. We are sinners. And the judgment of God affects us in two ways. It affects us now in the sense that God has given us up to follow our own sinful desires. We see the consequences of that all around us in the world. But there is also a more serious consequence in that we will have to stand before God on the day of judgment. And therefore the consequences of our sin are not just temporal, they are also eternal. However, despite our sin and our helplessness, God has revealed his righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul moves on to at the end of chapter 3. God has sent his son to be our Savior. And Jesus

Christ has been put forward as a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of God so that our sin which was provoking God's wrath, that wrath is now turned away from us, turned onto Christ so that he takes our place and we can be saved. That salvation is not something that we earn. It is given to us as a free gift. And as a result, we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. That's really the core of the Gospel, justification by faith, not by works, but by faith. That takes us to the end of chapter 3. In chapter 4, Paul talks about Abraham, who is the great model and example of justification by faith. Then in chapter 5, Paul moves on from justification to start talking about all the blessings which flow on from the fact that we can be declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. And that's a theme that he'll continue in chapter 8. Remember we said justification is not the goal of the Gospel. In many ways it's just the start. From the point of our justification, we are led into a whole realm of astounding blessings. And then in the last half of chapter 5, Paul kind of summarises his whole presentation by saying that ultimately humanity is divided into two groups. The old humanity is under the headship of Adam. The new humanity is united under the headship of Jesus Christ. And really Paul's great message is this, we are helpless. We can't do anything. But God has done everything that we need to be saved. And His grace is big enough and abundant enough to deal with all of our sins and to give us a perfect salvation. And so when it comes to receiving God's salvation in our lives, it's not a transaction which we earn. It is a gift that we receive. It is all of

God's grace. But immediately Paul recognises a potential problem. And that problem lies in the fact that grace is easily misunderstood. And this is what he deals with in chapter 6 and chapter 7. So in some ways chapter 6 and chapter 7 are kind of like a slightly new section, but they're very much following on from what Paul has just been teaching.

[5 : 26] And if you read these chapters, you will see that Paul raises questions that he anticipates are arising in the minds of his readers. That's something you often see in Paul. It's as if he says, no, some of you might ask this, some of you might ask that, some of you might be thinking this. And maybe over the years, these are the kind of questions that he was often asked by people. If you read chapter 6 and 7, you can spot the questions quite easily because they all have the same answer. Let's look at the first one just to give you the idea. Romans 6, 1, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

By no means. And all the other questions can be recognised because they've got the same answer. By no means. In 6, 15 he says, are we to sin because we're not under the law but under grace? In 7, 7 he says, what then shall we say that the law is sin? And then in 7, 13 did that which is good then bring death to me? All of these questions receive the same answer. By no means. Now that little phrase by no means is a really important phrase and the translation that we have in the ESV is probably not really strong enough because the phrase that Paul uses is as strong and negative as he can find. He is effectively saying absolutely no way. Absolutely not. Never. The authorised version has God forbid. So are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. Now that's not a literal translation because the word God is not in the Greek but it is an excellent paraphrase because it really captures what Paul means. Are we to carry on sinning so that grace may abound? God forbid.

Absolutely no way. Now these questions basically reveal to us the topics that Paul is looking at in chapters 6 and 7 and we can basically split these two chapters into three sections and in each section Paul is addressing problems or errors that can arise from a misunderstanding of God's grace. And generally speaking Paul is dealing with how we as Christians now relate to three important areas of life and we can summarise chapter 6 and 7 under three questions.

Question one, as Christians how do we relate to sin? That's what he tackles in verses 1 to 14 of chapter 6. Second question, as Christians how do we relate to the law? That's 6:15 through to 7:12.

And then thirdly, as Christians how do we relate to ourselves? That's what he deals with in chapter 7, 13 to 25. And these three questions all being well will be the topic of the next three sermons that we have in our series on Romans. So today we're going to look at question one. As Christians how do we relate to sin? Now that's a really really important question because from the moment we become Christians we enter into a battle between our old sinful nature and the new regenerate nature that we have through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. Every single Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and that brings us into conflict. Paul highlights that in Galatians 5, the desires of the flesh are against the spirit. Flesh is another word for our old sinful nature. Desires of the flesh are against the spirit. The desires of the spirit are against the flesh for these are opposed to each other. This is a great reminder of the fact that Christians are not perfect people. We're not sinless and even though our faith in Jesus Christ has brought an amazing change in our lives, we still struggle with sin. And the Bible is full of accounts of people, believers who stumble and fall into sin. And of course this conflict makes perfect sense because if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian which you can even right now, then you have switched allegiance from the kingdom of evil to the kingdom of God. You are no longer an enemy of God. You are no longer alienated from him. You are now God's friend and God's child.

[10:17] But that also means that you are no longer a friend of Satan. And that of course is a brilliant thing. It's what we all want but it also means that we are now in a battle. And some important consequences arise from that. And there's things that we have to make sure that we understand. And there's two key things I want to highlight initially. First of all, we can use grace as an excuse to be blasé about sin. That's what Paul says in this first question. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Now remember Paul has just said in chapter 5 that even though your sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. So nobody can come to God and say I'm too sinful.

Nobody can come to God and say I'm too far gone because God says my grace is big enough and strong enough and abundant enough for you no matter how much. God will never lose. God's grace will never be defeated by the power of sin. God's grace abounds. But we could then say oh well if that's the case I can do what I like. I can sin as much as I want because God's grace will just abound.

And so Paul is asking the question if you're a Christian can you just do whatever you like because you're saved? And the answer is no. You can't. We can never use God's grace as an excuse to sin because now we are in a battle against sin. We are in conflict and we are no longer on the side of sin. And this is something that Paul goes into in a little bit more detail in the second half of chapter 6 and so we'll look at it in a bit more detail next time. The key point is that we should never say to ourselves oh well I'm dependent on grace so I can just sin like I did before because I can't help it and grace will abound anyway. We must not think like that. This though raises a second issue and this is the one I want to focus on this week and that is the whole issue of how we relate to sin as Christians because we are trying to overcome sin in our lives. We don't want to sin against God. We want to be different. But as we face this battle between the flesh and the spirit between our old self and our new self as we face this battle against sin we can feel as though we are powerless in terms of fighting this battle. And so in terms of our struggle against sin we often feel overwhelmed. Sin can seem so powerful and we face temptations and it all seems too strong to resist. The urge to sin can be so intense. The world is so enticing and sometimes our hearts just like that will just spring up into a reaction that is sinful before we even realize what we're doing. And for every Christian it might be different sins that they struggle with. For some it may be lust. For others it might be greed. For some it may be their temper. For others gossip. For many of us it is pride. Our Christian lives are a constant battle against sin and all too often we feel as though we are losing that battle. And so if I was to ask you the following question what would you say? Here's the question. As a Christian here on earth are you able to overcome the power of sin in your life? Are you able to overcome it? What do you think? Well my instinctive answer to that question is no and I'm sure that you will probably think the same thing because all too often we are so conscious of our weakness. But do you know what is amazing? If you said no to that question you're 100% wrong. Because here in Romans 6 Paul is saying that if you ask the question are you as a Christian able to overcome the power of sin in your life? The answer is yes. It is 100% yes.

Look at what he says in verse 14. Sin will have no dominion over you. Now that means what it says.

A Christian is no longer under sin's dominion. Sin in other words is not our master. We are free.

[15:35] And that means that every time that we feel helpless in the face of sin we are listening to a lie. And that's the crucial point. If you're a Christian or if you become one and you think to yourself well sin is dominating every dominating my life and I can't help it. I am powerless and I have got no hope against this battle again in this battle against sin. If you are thinking like that then you're thinking something that is theologically incorrect. In Romans 6 Paul's great point is that sin will have no dominion over you. And he explains the theological reasons why. And it's important therefore that we understand what he's saying. And so we're going to go through it together in a wee bit more detail just to try and make sure that we can understand what Paul is telling us.

So let's look back at verses 1 to 10. I won't read through them all soon we read them already. Here Paul is highlighting the doctrine that lies at the very heart of the New Testament.

Union with Christ. This is what the passage is all about. The fact that as Christians we are united to Jesus Christ. And that union to Jesus Christ means that we are joined with him and therefore we participate in all that he has done and we share in the benefits of his finished work.

That's the practical outworking of Christ's federal headship. Remember in chapter 5 Paul says you're either in Adam or you're in Christ. You're either united to Adam or you're united to Christ.

If we are believers or if you become one you are united to Jesus Christ. And in particular Paul is highlighting that we are united to him in his death and in his resurrection. 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.

[17 : 39] So Paul is saying two vital things there. First of all we are united to Jesus in his death. Now that just means what it says it means. It means that spiritually speaking when Jesus died on the cross we died. So Paul says in the very next verse our old self was crucified with him.

That's why our debt is paid on the cross. That's why our sin is atoned for because Jesus died in our place. Therefore our body of sin is brought to nothing as the end of verse 6 says we share in the power we share in his death. Our sin is fully and completely dealt with on the cross.

So we're united to Jesus when he died. We are also united to Jesus when he rose. We're united to him in his resurrection. So just as how old self died on the cross so too we now have a new self and a new life through the power of his resurrection. In other words because Jesus is alive we are now spiritually alive as well. And all of this means that the transfer from being in Adam to being in Christ involves death and resurrection for every believer spiritually speaking. So here's a wee picture to show you. Before we are saved we're in Adam. We're in the box there on the left.

Once we put our faith into Christ we once we put our faith in Jesus we are no longer in Adam. We go into the other box we are in Christ and the transfer between the two is by means of death and resurrection. We die with Christ on the cross that means we leave the Adam box and we rise to new life in Christ which means we enter into the Christ box. We go through this process through union with Christ of death and resurrection. In union with Christ our sinful self is crucified because we share in the sufficiency of his death and in union with Christ we are now alive because we share in the power of his resurrection. That's what happens to us. We are united with Christ.

We go from being in Adam to being in Christ because we are united to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now we're going to pause for two minutes because Paul highlights an important point that I want to mention briefly. This what we have before us here is a key part of what is symbolized in baptism and at the beginning of chapter 6 Paul talks about baptism. He says do you not know all of us who've been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead the glory to the by the glory of the Father we too might walk in unison of life. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ and therefore Paul reminds his readers of their baptism of what and of what it symbolized. Now Romans 6 is the kind of passage that can get us tied up and not said a little bit about baptism both in terms of who should get it and in terms of how it should be done because some people would argue that this passage shows that baptism is only for adults and baptism should always be by immersion. Now I don't want to spend too much time on this because

[21 : 31] I'm already running out of time but I do just want to mention a couple of things very briefly. First of all the primary type of baptism found in the New Testament is adult baptism. That's obvious and it's to be expected because the church was going out and it was bringing the gospel to an unreached people and we always want to make sure that we understand that that here in the free church and in our Presbyterian context we are totally in favour of adult baptism. In fact we long to see adults being baptized. We live in a day where we're surrounded by people who have no connection with the church and we long to see them come to faith in Jesus Christ and when they do these people will be baptized as a sign and seal of their union with Christ and always remember that's what makes someone a church member. You are baptized into church membership. So if an unbaptised adult came to faith in our congregation we would baptize them with great joy and that baptism is a symbol of their union with Christ and it would bring them into the membership of the church. Adult baptism is something that we are totally in favour of, something that we long to see. Now secondly some argue that that baptism has to be by immersion. Now we don't agree with that, we would say it can be by immersion but it doesn't have to be and the reason we say that is because we don't think that the Greek word for baptism requires immersion. I don't want to go into that, we can look at that another day. What I simply want to highlight is that we've got a lot of common ground with Baptists. We're not against adult baptism, we're a hundred percent for it, we're not against immersion but we don't insist on it. We share a lot of common ground. The difference is in what we do with our children. A Baptist of course would say it is not right to put the sign of baptism onto children because the New Testament doesn't tell us to. That's what the

Baptists would say. We would say that it is right to do so because the Old Testament told us to do it and the New Testament hasn't told us to stop and that's really what lies at the heart of the debate and I'm sure the debate will go on until the second coming. The key point that Paul is highlighting in this chapter is that if someone has come to faith they should be baptised because their baptism is a symbol of the glorious truth that that person is now united to Christ. Now that of course applies only to those who've not been brought up in the church. We believe that a child being brought up in the church should also be baptised. Anyway as I said that was two minutes aside on baptism. I wanted to mention it though because Paul mentions it here. The key point however about the chapter and that's what we must focus on is that as Christians we are united to Christ and because we're united to Christ and to his death and resurrection our relationship towards sin has totally changed. If you go back to verses one to ten and you look at his argument Paul is basically saying that you are united to Christ therefore what applies to Christ applies to you. So did

Christ's death deal with sin? Yes it did. So if you are united to Christ your sin is dealt with. Did Christ rise again to new life? Yes he did. So if you are united to Christ then you walk in new lives of life and now here's the really important part. Is the resurrected Christ under the power of sin and death? The answer is no. So if you are united to Christ are you under the dominion of sin and death? And the answer is quite logical. No you are not. That's what Paul is saying in these verses. And so if we come back to our question are you able to overcome the power of sin in your life? Union with Christ means that the answer to that question is yes because if we are united to Christ sin has no power over us whatsoever. That's why Paul says how can he who has died to sin still live in it? If we have died to sin then our life in that realm is over and sin has no power left with which to dominate us. Now I want to just recap that to make sure that it's clear because I suppose it's quite complicated or maybe I'm making it complicated I hope I'm not.

But let's just look back at our boxes okay. So here you have Adam and Christ right? You're either in Adam you're in Christ saved or unsaved one box or the other. Now before we are converted we are in the Adam box that's where we are under the power of sin. Sin has dominion over us in that box because Adam fell we fell in him and with him and at the heart of that is the threat of death. Sin is a grip on us. Sin we are enslaved under sin's power. So imagine sin as a slave master and we are under its power. Just imagine picture yourself as a slave under the dominion of sin. So sin our slave master says be greedy we can't stop ourselves. Be proud we can't stop ourselves. Sin dominates us and we are powerless. Imagine yourself you're in a room or in a field under the grip and authority and command of the slave master and you've got no choice but to obey. But if you die so imagine that you are lying dead in that field. The slave master can't get you to do anything can he? And so if you're lying dead in the field and the slave master says do this you're not going to respond. The slave master says get up you're not going to get up.

Slave master says go over there you're not going to go anywhere. And so all of that slave master's power is gone because the slave is dead. And the vital point that Paul is making is that if we are united to Christ the old self that is in that box is dead. And so sin has got no power over you.

[28 : 51] We died spiritually speaking through our union with Christ. So no matter what orders have been backed up you there's no power behind them because through our union with Christ we died. But that of course is only half the message of the gospel because our union with Christ means that we have also we are also sharing in his resurrection life. So having died in that atom box we are now alive in the Christ box if you like. So our old self is gone dead brought to nothing and we no longer live in that realm. We are now in Christ's box we are united to Christ and sin has no authority whatsoever in that box we have died and come out of one realm and we've been raised again and brought into another. Now that all sounds quite complicated you think well you know where's Paul getting all this this idea of dying out of one realm and coming to life again and another it all seems very complicated. Do you know Jesus had a brilliantly simple way of describing this process? What did

Jesus say? You need to be born again and that's what he's talking about. We need our life under the grip of sin to end and we need to be born again into new life in the kingdom of God and it's through our union with Christ that it happens because Christ went into that atom box and he died in our place and then he was raised to life and now sits at the right hand of the Father establishing a new box into which we are all being called and into which we have and within which we have new life. That's what happens to everybody who becomes a Christian so if you are a Christian that's what has happened to you. If you put your faith in Jesus Christ that's what will happen to you. It's an amazing rescue, an amazing deliverance that's why Paul says you're free but the devil does not like it one bit and often sin is screaming at us from the atom box so we are in the Christ box but sin is screaming at us from the other box saying do what I say do this do that go here go there and sin is trying to claim authority over our lives trying to dominate us trying to maintain that grip over us that it once had. Sin is screaming across at Christians in the Christ box and do we need to listen? Do we need to obey?

Are we still in Adam's box? No we are not and so we are under no obligation whatsoever to obey the cruel slave driver commands that sin is shouting at us. As Christians we are not under the dominion of sin and therefore we do not need to live as though we were and that's the really important point that Paul is emphasizing we think to ourselves there's no way I can overcome sin there's no way I can live a different life there's no way I can be what God wants me to be.

Paul is saying yes you can because Christ has delivered you and the Holy Spirit dwelling in you now enables you to live a new way and on that basis Paul gives us three commandments in verses 11 to 13. First of all he says change the way you think look at what he says you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Paul is saying you need to think in a new way and I read that and I think to myself I need to think in a new way we must stop thinking that we are under the power of sin we are not that means we can resist the temptation to sin we can overcome our foolish habits we can live new and changed lives not because we are the strength to but because Christ has delivered us and united us to himself. Paul is not saying that we definitely will always overcome sin but he's saying we definitely can and the key to that is thinking differently so if you face that temptation tomorrow so say tomorrow sin starts knocking on your door or starts pulling on your heart a temptation to do something that you've been struggling with if you face that tomorrow you need to think differently and you need to think Christ has overcome sin and

I am united to him and on the basis of that power I am going to live a new way and a different way our whole thinking should be shaped by the theological truths of the New Testament. Paul says change the way you think consider yourself dead to sin so tomorrow morning don't get out of bed thinking I'm doomed to failure because you're not tomorrow morning get out of bed and think I'm united to Christ and every step I take is going to be taken on the basis of that. Second commandment of Paul's is this in verse 12 do not let sin reign over you. Now the great point that Paul's made is that as Christians sin doesn't reign over you but so often we think it does. Paul is saying don't do that and this works itself out in very practical ways if we let sin reign over us then we are simply letting sin determine what we do. So imagine somebody waltzed into this church building and they said I'm in charge now you have to do what I'm going to say I'm going to control you all they would have no legal or ecclesiastical power but if we all started listening to that person then effectively they will be reigning over us and that would be a crazy thing to do we should say no you are not in charge you can't come and just grab authority for yourself we are not going to do what you say that is what our reaction should be every time sin tempts us. So when the devil tempts you to have that drink that will make you get drunk or to get that car that will make you look good or to get that person back who's hurt you or to tell that lie or to give into that lust whenever we face these false claims of authority from the kingdom of darkness our response should be get away from me you have no dominion over me do not let sin reign in your body to make you obey its passions we don't need to do that and then thirdly do not let your members that's your body your actions your thinking don't let these be used as instruments of unrighteousness instead every part of the way we live should be done in a way whereby we are instruments for righteousness a means by which

[37:19] God's ways are lived out in every part of our lives sin has no claim on you as a Christian sin has no right to use you for its purposes and that is why as Christians we are now part of a new humanity that's what Paul has told us in chapter five that's what really lies at the whole of the gospel message we're no longer in the old humanity that belonged to Adam we are in a new humanity that is in Christ and that has been restored to the image of God into everything that God wants us to be that's why as Christians we should always be different from the world so when the world is cold and harsh and selfish and greedy and immoral we are different because we're a new humanity and we are being restored to everything that God wants us to be and that's really what Paul is saying here as Christians God has poured his grace into our lives in abundance but the reality of grace does not mean that we can just go on and be like the world and do whatever we like and carry on sinning either deliberately or helplessly the grace of God means that we have been brought into a new realm as a new humanity and because of that sin is no longer the boss of your life so never ever ever think that you have to do what sin is telling you to do now that of course is a big challenge because sin can seem so strong and so persuasive and so dominant and on our own we cannot stand up to the power of sin but the whole point of union with Christ is that you're never on your own you are always always united to Christ so yes sin is an opponent and we are in a battle but sin is nowhere near as powerful as we think it is and even though it's inevitable that we will face conflict it is not inevitable that we are going to succumb and lose that battle that's why

Jesus said lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil because we do not need to fall into temptation and we do not need to commit evil as Christians we can live a new way now of course in all of that we are totally dependent on God we must always remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10 if anyone thinks he stands take heed lest he fall but if we do take heed and if we think and live according to what God is telling us if we remember our union with Christ then by God's grace we can stand up to the temptation of sin and that is one of the many many reasons why being a Christian is so wonderful because sin is a horrible enemy and sin is a ruthless slave master but if you trust in Jesus Christ you are able to lay hold of these glorious words sin will have no dominion over you let's pray God our Father we pray that that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ we pray that we would not let sin reign over us and we pray that we would not obey its passions and we pray that our members would be instruments of righteousness not instruments of unrighteousness and that we would really live every moment of our lives on the basis of the great theological truth that we are united to Christ thank you for all that this passage is teaching us please shape us in our hearts and in our minds so that when we face that battle against sin we would remember that because we are united to Jesus we can stand against the temptations that have been thrown in front of us so please shape our hearts and our minds according to the truths of God's word and for us all in the week ahead if we face temptation please fill our minds with these truths in Jesus name we pray amen