Romans 6:1-11 21st June 2020

Have you ever had one of those arguments with yourself where it goes back and forth in your head? It can be like an argument with an imaginary opponent.

Here at the start of Roman’s Chapter 6, we find St Paul continuing to do just that.

In this letter to the church in Rome, he has been wrestling with the growing division between two groups of Christians. One group comes from a Jewish background, where they were brought up to believe in one living God, who revealed himself to their ancestors through prophets and miracles. Their strict rules had been passed down to them through many generations of priests and teachers, and these rules shaped every aspect of their lives from how they worshiped, through to what they ate and how they lived as a community. The other group in the church came from a pagan background, where they worshipped idols representing many different gods. Almost every aspect of how they lived clashed with the sensitivities of the Jewish Christians.

Paul’s letter encourages both groups to focus on the big thing about the Christian faith, and that it is vastly more important than all the differences that they keep concentrating on. In other words, he is talking about the important stuff that is to draw them together, rather than separate them.

He concentrates their attention on Jesus and the grace of God.

They may have different backgrounds, different styles of clothes and different foods that they prefer, but Paul reminds them of their common family connection. They are united by faith in Jesus; in his death to pay for our sins, in his resurrection to life again, and his ascension to be with God the Father. They have been rescued by God in just the same way; faith in Jesus and it is all by the grace of God. Both have been adopted into the Lord’s family and are now brothers and sisters in Christ for ever, and can never be separated. It doesn’t matter what background they, or we have, all Christians are united by faith in Christ alone.

As an aside, it is interesting to think about all the different Christian communities and denominations, in different church buildings, here in the South West of Pembrokeshire. We have many different styles, preferences, needs and backgrounds, but we are all one in Christ and are eternal brothers and sisters in the Lord’s family.

Now he turns his attention to the: ‘So what difference does that make?’ sort of question from Chapter 6.

**6**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? **2**By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? **3**Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? **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.

**5**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6**For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+6%3A1-11&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-28075a)] that we should no longer be slaves to sin – **7**because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

**8**Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9**For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. **10**The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

**11**In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (NIVUK)

It is rather a dense passage, but let’s see if I can open it up for us to understand the essence of it.

If God’s grace was big enough to cover our worst sins, then perhaps it doesn’t matter how we live because God will cover it anyway, and as we sin, His grace will abound all the more, and we will see even more of God’s amazing grace. Surely that would be a good thing?

(Many Christians today try and live under this understanding. They have grasped how amazing the gift of God’s Grace is, but they have not grasped how terrible a problem the sin in our lives is in the way it separates us from the love of God. This is often referred to as ‘Cheep Grace’ because it does not count the enormous cost of Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

Paul’s response is an emphatic: “By no means! How can we who died to sin, still live in it?” It is as if we used to live in a way that was like swimming in a river of sin. We may not have sinned directly in everything that we did, but it affected everything we did, from the moment we would get up in the morning, until last thing at night. We tolerated the sin, rather than grieved over it; we made no progress in overcoming its influence on our lives, rather than fighting it.

But now we are aligned to a different way of living, as Christ followers. Christians are set free from being constantly dragged down by the sin in our lives, to the far more glorious and fulfilling life like that of Jesus. We are now alive in a new, God-centred life in Christ. He has set us free from the tyranny of always being shaped by this broken world.

It is such a tremendous privilege for Christians to be transformed from being slaves to our sin, to being set free and united with Christ.

But many who have been blessed this way don’t go on to live in the truth of it.

It is like someone in great financial difficulty, inheriting a huge trust fund, but not withdrawing any money from it. They continue to live as if they are in great debt with a burden on their shoulders and struggle on day by day. Their life is burdensome because they feel that they have to do things so that they are good enough to deserve the money. Christians who live this way may understand how bad sin is, but they have not grasped the wonderful glory of God’s grace. This way of living is sometimes referred to as trying to be right with God through our ‘works’.

The reality is that, if we are alive in Christ, then we have an enormous positive balance in our account with God, He has forgiven us our past wrongs and gifted us a life of joy in Him.

Paul challenges us to be careful how we live. If we continue to try and live like a slave to sin, like one in debt, then we are not living to our true new selves. In fact, our lives suggest that the Lord’s promises and gifts are a falsehood. We make Christ out to be a liar.

Yes, we are still going to mess up; to sin by lying, cheating, getting angry, and a whole load of other things, but these are not to define who we are anymore. When we turn back to look at these sorts of actions, then we grieve over them, and we ask for the Lord’s forgiveness, and hand them over to Him so that they no longer control us.

Like a forgiven child, we receive the loving hug from the Lord, with the words “Your forgiven my child. Be the person who you have been created to be, you don’t need to do those things anymore”, and we are sent out into the world again, free of guilt and shame, for our heavenly Father has forgiven us.

When we understand His grace like that, then we want to live for His glory so much more, and to sin so much less.

Here are some questions to help think about how this truth impacts our own life:

How does this both encourage and challenge you?

What areas of your life are you in danger of “living in sin”?

Where is that fight with sin that is particularly difficult for you at the moment?

How would remembering what has happened to your old self, and who you are now in Christ, help you next time the battle is raging?

Please remember, that every Christian who seeks to follow the ways of Jesus will wrestle with sin in their lives. The wrestling is a sign that the lord is alive in you, the Holy Spirit prompting you, and that you are not forgotten, but loved and cherished by Him. If that were not so, then you would not wrestle, but simply give in to every and all desires that you could get away with, and not worry about the wrongness of your actions.

These battles will continue in us until the day we die, but over time, as we look back over our lives, we will see a growth in spiritual maturity, of selfless deeds becoming a more natural part of who we are, of a servant-hooded way of living, just as Jesus calls us to live.

For anyone hearing or reading this that has not asked Jesus into their lives and put their trust in his death on the cross for them, then you will hopefully have an insight into the daily struggle that all Christians have in following Jesus. But you will also see how he removes the burden of our wrongdoings and the strain on us from our behaviour that causes hurt to others. He blesses us with a joy and lightness of spirit, and peacefulness that goes with us day by day. And the times when Christians are struggling to feel that peace, it is not because the Lord has moved away from us, but that we have turned away from him. But He is always there for us, waiting for our glance back in His direction to see His compassion and ever giving grace for us, His open arms of welcome.

May you know the Joy and Peace in believing, as you live in the truth of being alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Amen