The Way of Freedom: Know, Consider, Do
Romans 6:1-14

I'd like you to put yourself in the shoes of someone deeply sceptical about the goodness of Christianity. What criticisms might they have? That it's homophobic? Misogynistic? Imperialistic? Or, as one writer recently put it, it's 'Yesterday's news but the source of today's problems'?

Well, look at v1: 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?' And realise it or not, in saying that, Paul's confronting the sceptics of his day - whose criticisms were almost the direct opposite of today's. Because they were saying something like, 'All this stuff about the gospel, and God's grace, and being justified by faith - it's a licence to sin.'

Because think what Paul wrote at the end of chapter 5: 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Rom 5:20). 'Exactly,' a critic might say, 'so where's the motive to stop sinning? If grace abounds as sin abounds, why not just carry on in? You need to get real Paul. This gospel of grace is not enough, you need to tell people to obey the commandments; tell them doing good matters, and that if they want to be saved, they need to be doing it.'

Which is makes Paul's response all the more extraordinary, isn't it? Because if his critics had got him wrong; if he was *already* telling people they did need to do good works to be saved, or to obey the commandments to not fall into sin, what would he have said? 'Hey, guys, you've misunderstood me; we do preach God's grace plus your works; we do preach 'you need to obey' as a motivation to holiness.'

But he doesn't.

And that doesn't just matter for an ancient sceptic. It matters for you. Because if grace does abound where sin abounds, does it really matter whether I sin or not?'

And Paul is saying, 'Oh, sure it matters - but it's only the gospel - of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that can really help you fight sin *and* motivate goodness without stoking self-righteousness.'

So, we're going to look at 3 things: What you need to know; How you need to think; and what you need to do if you want to see real progress against sin, or real change in your life.

What You Need to Know
Verses 1-2: 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?'

Can you hear Paul's incredulity? A Christian? Someone who's come to see all that Christ has done for him, carrying on in sin? That would be absurd!

Why? Because we've died to sin.

Now, does he mean by that that when someone becomes a Christian, sin - which is living life the way you want as if God didn't exist; choosing other things above God, or doing things you shouldn't do, or not doing stuff you should - will have no more attraction to you than it has to a corpse in a morgue?

Because have you ever visited a mortuary? And over there is Mr Smith's body - but he's not flying into a rage like he used to. And over there is Mrs Jones – but she's not criticising others like she used to. And young David Rogers over there, killed in a car accident, he's not undressing every young woman with his eyes like he used to.

So are we as dead to sin as a corpse is dead to sin? No – because if that were the case why do genuine Christians still get angry, or gossip, or struggle with our desires?

Or does he mean 'sin now has zero power over you!' Well, no - because if he did, why tell us later to take active steps against sin?

Or maybe he means that sin's power over your life may not be dead but it is weakened. But a dead enemy isn't weak, is he? He's dead. And an *injured* and cornered enemy may be just as deadly as a perfectly well one.

So what does he mean? Well, look at v10. He's talking about Jesus: 'For the death he died *he died to sin*.' So whatever Paul means by *us* being dead to sin must be the same as what he means by *Jesus* dying to sin.

And at the cross, Christ paid for our sins in full, and he exhausted their power and claim over us - so when he died, he died to sin's demands. So if you're Christian, and putting your trust in him, you're united with him by faith, and sin's claim and power over you have also been exhausted.

The other day, someone was talking to me about the political situation in the UK, and how bad things were, and said, 'and as for *your* Prime Minister…!' To which I replied – 'hey, you can't pin that one on me, I'm Swiss now!' What was I saying? What Paul's saying here. That I've died to the UK; that my allegiance and jurisdiction has changed. And you have died to sin, Paul says, because Christ is now your Lord, not sin.

Look how he puts it to the Colossians: 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son' (Col 1:13). Or before King Agrippa, he says that in turning to Christ we 'turn from darkness to light and from the power of satan to God.' (Acts 26:18).

In other words, sin, and satan, and darkness, they're not the controlling powers over your life any more. That was your old life but in Christ you've died to that life.

Verse 3, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?' Now, is Paul talking there about the moment at conversion when the Spirit baptises us into and unites us with Christ? Or water baptism? Or both? Well, personally, I think it's the first: that when you put your faith in Christ for the first time, and you are united with him by faith, then as Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'In one Spirit we were all baptised into one body' (1 Cor 12:13) – Christ's body.

And the moment that happened, Paul is saying, you switched teams. Now, you're on Christ's team. You're in his tribe. And now, he's your captain, he's your Lord, he's your head. And when he died, you died. When he broke the claim and power of sin at the cross, its claim and power over you was broken. A spiritual reality that the physical act of baptism powerfully symbolises.

So imagine dark and sinister forces have overrun a city in a kingdom. And they're subjecting its citizens to untold misery. But the king – and he's a good king - launches a counter-attack, retakes the city, and those dark forces flee.

And for a Christian to carry on living the same old life of sin would be like citizens in that city living as if the rightful king had not been restored and the glorious revolution had never happened. But it has, Paul says.

And yet… will that city live in peace from now on? Well, yes and no! Yes, because the king is now on his throne; but no, because the enemy's out there, hiding in the woods, launching guerrilla attacks, and trying to have the people live in fear.

And Christ has won the decisive victory, and sin's power has been broken, and united with him, his victory is our victory. But sin will still try to reassert its authority, and have you believe 'its only a matter of time 'til you surrender.'

But you don't have to, Paul says, because it's not just Christ's *death* you're united with. Verse 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*.'

So just like Jesus died and was raised, so we are raised to new life in him. Verse 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.'

So, in Christ, Paul says, your old life has been sent to the gallows, it's been put before the firing squad, it's had his, or her, appointment with madame la guillotine; because, v6: '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.'

What does he mean by 'the body of sin'? Well, look at v12: 'Let not sin therefore reign *in your mortal body*.' In other words, the body of sin is our physical bodies doing what sin wants them to do.

And that doesn't take much imagining, does it? I mean, think of some of the great blessings in life, like food and drink. What happens when sin gets a hold of them? Greed happens, and we eat and drink too much. Or think about the ability to rest at the end of a long day. What happens when sin gets a hold of that? Sloth happens, and we avoid the hard work of love.

Or think of sex. What happens when sin gets a hold of that? Sex becomes twisted and we're overcome by inordinate desires. And Paul is saying, 'that's the body of sin.'

But our old self, the person we used to be, has been crucified, dead and buried with Christ, so that body of sin is brought to nothing. So sin no longer controls, or defines *you* or *what you do* with your body. Christ does.

Or, to use the image Paul uses, sin is no longer your slave master. Verse 7, 'For one who has died has been set free from sin.' It's like sin used to keep you shackled in chains, but Christ has bust you

free. It's like you used to live behind the Iron Curtain, but now Christ has torn down the Berlin Wall.

But again, it's not just that your old life is gone. Verse 8, 'Now if we have died with Christ, *we believe that we will also live with him*.' In other words, united with Christ you really can walk free. You really can walk out of your slave master's house; you really can cross that rubble strewn wall. Because, v9, 'We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.' And because death no longer has dominion over him, v14, 'Sin will have no dominion over you.'

And v10, 'for the death he died he died to sin, once for all but the life he lives he lives to God.' So there's no need for Jesus' sacrifice to be endlessly repeated, or for you to make any other sacrifice to win God's favour, or break sin's power. Christ has done it all, Paul says, once and for all. And in him, you are free.

Great… at least theoretically great… but what are we supposed to do with that?

How You Need to Think
Verse 11: 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.'

So what's Paul's answer to why we shouldn't carry on in sin? Is it, 'hey, you're a Christian, so stick the ten commandments on your fridge and do them'? Is it, 'you just need to try harder and pray more'? No – it's consider yourself, reckon yourself, count yourself in Christ and dead to sin in him. That to carry on in the olds ways would be as absurd as an Dutchman living in Switzerland going out every summer's day with a raincoat and an umbrella, because he's thinking like he's still in the flatlands. But rain-soaked summers? That was the old you.

Instead, the gospel has changed you. It's changed who you are and where you live and who you're in. But you don't just learn that once and never think of it again, Paul says. You're to daily consider yourself, and talk to yourself, like that.

And in his book, *Spiritual Depression*, Martin Lloyd Jones argues that the real skill of the Christian life is to listen to yourself less, and speak to yourself more: specifically, to speak the gospel to yourself.

And honestly, learning to do that that has been *the* most helpful thing in my own struggle against sin and dark and depressive thoughts. I vividly remember as a newish Christian reading this passage from Romans 6, and its implication hit me like a lightning bolt: 'Oh! I'm dead to sin! And I'm in Christ. And sin's no longer my master!' So when temptation raises its head, I can speak to myself, 'Martin, you are united with Christ and your old self was crucified with Christ, you've died to that sin, so you don't need to give in.'

And Paul is saying, when temptation or dark thoughts rear their head, tell your heart, I am in Christ and I am dead to that. That old life is gone.

So, imagine you're being criticised at home or at work and you are sorely tempted to hit back, what do you do? Give it to them with both barrels? Or speak to yourself, 'Hey, treating others the way

they've treated me? That's the way of the world, but I've died to that world, and I'm in Christ, so I don't need to respond like that.'

And to give in to that temptation would be like a butterfly continuing to crawl in the dirt like a caterpillar when it's been transformed to fly. It would be like a man going unwashed for 4 days and living off chips and beer, thinking he's single, when he needs to look at his ring and look at his wife and tell himself, 'I'm a husband' and live like one. It would be like a prisoner, who's served his sentence, refusing to leave his prison cell, when what he needs to do is tell himself, 'I'm free', and walk out the door and into freedom.

And Paul is saying, in Christ you've died to sin and been raised to life. So consider yourself like that. And when temptation comes, preach the gospel to yourself.

Ok, but is that it? No.

What You Need to Do

And in Genesis 4 we're given the account of Cain killing his brother Abel. But in the build-up, God warns Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). And we can look at some sin, like self-pity, or envy, or a critical spirit, and think 'it's small, it's harmless, it's a mere pussy cat, and I can stroke it and play with it, and housetrain it; keep it under control.' But it's not a cat, is it? It's a crouching tiger, it's a predator, hunting its prey, and you are that prey. And God says to Cain, it wants to rule over you, but you must rule over it.

So look again at v12, 'Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.' And think, how does sin make you obey its passions? By having you think you can't do without it. That you must have this thing to be happy. Or by telling you resistance is futile, you're going to give in eventually, so why go through the fight?

And how does sin reign over you? By having you excuse your sin, and tell yourself: it's not so bad, and your circumstances justify it; in fact, it's not really sin. And by multiplying. You lie once and the next time, it's that bit easier to lie again; or you lie once and then you have to lie to cover up the first lie. Or by exacting tax and tribute from you. Because there's always a cost to sin – in the corruption of your character, or damage to your relationships, or draining your energy.

So, v12 again: 'Let not sin therefore reign.' Because that old government of sin has been overthrown and the rightful king has returned. So don't tolerate your sin, Paul says.

I mean, imagine a friend who's a pig farmer and one day he asks for your help on the farm. But as you're helping in the pig sty you slip on some pig muck and find yourself face down in the muck. What do you do? Do you lie there rolling around? No! You get up and get out and go take a shower!

And Paul is saying, 'You've been crucified with Christ, and raised with Christ – so don't roll in the muck. Don't let sin reign.'

And then, v13, 'Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.' That's the negative. And then the positive: 'but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.'

So sure, you used to give your eyes and ears to watching stuff you shouldn't; and you used to go places with your feet, and touch stuff with your hands that you shouldn't; and you used to think stuff with your mind that if others knew about it, you'd be ashamed. But now, you're a Christian, so offer that same physical body of yours to God, Paul says, because Christ offered his physical body for you. As John Stott wrote, 'Our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform mundane tasks…, our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.' Why? Because now Christ is our king, not sin.

Verse 14, 'For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.' Did you notice what he doesn't say? Given what's gone before, you might expect him to say, 'sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not *under sin* but under grace.' But he doesn't! He says, 'sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.'

You see, all the time you think you have to earn your salvation by your works, or that it's faith plus works, or by fighting against sin and it's faith plus obeying the commandments, you're never going to win the battle against sin. Because you'll only ever replace one sin with another. Sure, you might get control of your anger, by telling yourself 'someone respectable like me should not get angry' but what have you replaced it with? What have you fought that anger with? Pride.

Or your motives will always be suspect. Sure, you'll do what's right instead of what's wrong, but why are you doing it? To put God in your debt and have him owe you. Or 'I need to obey or you'll reject me.'

But when you know you are counted righteous in Christ and all because of his grace; and that his death was your death, and his resurrection your resurrection, and you are loved in him, you can finally stop looking for love, or significance, or satisfaction in all the wrong places. And, at the same time, your pride will be humbled.

In other words, it's only by knowing you are not under law, that you're not saved by your good works, that you can actually start quitting the bad and doing the good that really is good. As as you do you'll live out the 'obedience of faith' that Paul talks about at the beginning and end of the letter.

So… know: you are united with Christ. Then consider yourself: dead to sin and alive to God. And then offer your body, and all you do with your body, to God – whose service is perfect freedom.