

**Why Can't I Go On Sinning?**  
*Scripture Lessons: Romans 6*

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

Here's how Kunta Kinta, the hero of *Roots*, was sold into slavery:

*The auctioneer shouted, "Top prime-young and supple!"*

*Kunta was already so numb with terror that he hardly noticed as the crowd moved in more closely around him. Then, using short sticks, they were pushing apart his compressed lips to expose his clenched teeth, and with their bare hands prodding him all over- under his armpits, on his back, his chest, his genitals. Then some of those who had been inspecting Kunta began to step back and cry out,*

*"Three hundred dollars!...three fifty!"*

*The auctioneer laughed scornfully. "This is a choice young slave! Do I hear seven fifty?"*

*"Seven Fifty!" someone shouted.*

*He repeated the price several times until someone shouted, "Eight Hundred!" Then, "Eight Fifty!"*

*No other bids were shouted out. The auctioneer unlocked Kunta's chain and jerked him toward the buyer who came stepping forward. Kunta felt an impulse to make his move right then, but he knew he would never make it.*

(Edited by me from *Roots* as quoted in *Romans: Christianity on Trial* by Carolyn Nystrom

If you had been Kunta Kinta and by some miracle you could choose your own master, what kind of person would you choose (Nystrom)? By the miracle of God's grace we can choose Jesus Christ as our master whose service leads to life and be freed of a hard slave master whose service leads to death.

That brings us to our scripture lesson for today. Up to this point in his letter, Paul has been saying that the Gospel is the good news that God declares us legally righteous and places us into a right relationship with himself through faith in Christ and without any good works on our part. He says this clearly in Chapter 4, verse 5, “But to one who without works trusts (Christ) who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

There’s nothing you can do to make yourself deserving of God’s grace. There’s no sin which can exclude you from being put right with God simply by trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior. Furthermore, Paul argues in Chapter 5 that our justification guarantees our hope of sharing in the glory of God. In other words, if we’re in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ we are guaranteed our ultimate salvation.

Someone says, “Great! I can keep on sinning because I’ve been justified and am guaranteed of God’s continuing grace. I don’t have to love my neighbor, I can cheat, exploit, and be mean and God will forgive. I don’t have to worship and serve God because God has guaranteed my salvation. God has given me a blank check and told me that he has enough grace in the bank to cover all my debts.”

*Now I am saved, Oh, happy condition;*

*Now I can sin, without fear of perdition.*

“Should we not, then, sin so that grace may abound?” Paul’s response to this question is, “Heaven forbid! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” He goes on to use an analogy to show impossible it is to have this attitude.

The analogy is that of slavery. Paul says that we were once slaves to sin. We willingly obeyed our slave master. When our master told us to sin we obeyed and we wanted to obey and we enjoyed obeying. We weren’t just slaves but willing slaves. But Christ, at the cost of his life, bought us from our old slave master and has allowed us to choose him as our Master. If we have faith in Christ we’re willing slaves of Christ.

How then can we who have been given new life in Christ, who have freely chosen Christ as our Master; how can we even think about returning to our old life and obeying our old master?

It's inconceivable!

But what do we do when the old life beckons us or when the old slave master comes to us and starts ordering us around?

Paul gives us three exhortations.

He tells us, first (in verse 11), look to the past! Remember that when Christ died on the cross years ago, you died and have now been given a new identity. "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Or again (verse 6), "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin."

Now, I often don't feel dead to sin or alive to Christ. The old slave master, sin, comes knocking on my door and says, "Hey! You do what I tell you. Who do you think you are?" When I heard that old slave master I often feel like Christ is my Master. But Paul isn't telling us to feel a certain way. We're told to consider ourselves dead to sin even when we don't feel dead to sin and to reckon ourselves alive to Christ even though we may not feel the life of Christ living in us. We simply believe the Gospel and keep reminding ourselves of the Gospel. I'm dead to sin and alive to Christ. I'm no longer bound to the old slaver master sin. I must remind myself that I have the life of Christ flowing through me. I've renounced that old slave master and freely chosen Christ as my master.

I remember visiting a Christian alcoholic who was a member of my church in Portsmouth, Ohio. He'd been active in the church serving for years on the session. There was no question of his love for Christ and the church. He'd given his time, energy and money to the work of Christ and wasn't embarrassed to speak of Christ to others. But from time to time this man went back to the

alcohol which eventually ruined his health, ended his career and destroyed his self-esteem. He was utterly ashamed, depressed and inconsolable about his relapses. But he believed the Gospel. He had faith in Christ and he'd tell me amidst tears, "This is not who I am. I'm a child of God. I belong to Christ even though I don't feel his presence or power." He refused to let go of his grip on the Gospel that God, in Christ, unconditionally loved, respected, honored and accepted him. So we must believe the Gospel and reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ, no longer enslaved to sin but a willing servant of Christ.

Secondly, Paul tells us, to look to the present. "Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness." Be responsible. Don't blame your past.

The old slave master keeps coming back to us demanding service from us. "Don't listen!" Paul says. "Don't obey! Rather present yourself to Christ to do his will!" We're not to remain passive in our spiritual warfare. We're to fight and struggle and not listen to the old slave master or do what he commands. We're to be what we are, alive, in Christ. We're not just to resist the old slave master, but we're to present ourselves to Christ to be used for Christ's purposes and kingdom.

Francis Ridley Havergal, the daughter of a Church of England clergyman, was born in 1836 and died in 1879. Long before the controversy about women's ordination she was an evangelist. Her life illustrates one who, presented herself to God as an instrument of righteousness. In the hymn she wrote-

*Take my life, and let it be*

*Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.*

*Take my moments and my days;*

*Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move*

*At the impulse of Thy love.*

*Take my feet, and let them be*

*Swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine;*

*It shall be no longer mine.*

*Take my heart, it is Thine own;*

*It shall be Thy royal throne.*

The best way to do this is not simply trying to struggle to refrain from sin...but the presents of our gifts and talents to be used by Christ.

This hymn is autobiographical. Miss Havergal was continuously at work, writing poetry, singing, traveling here and there in her evangelistic work, singing and speaking the gospel, giving away whatever she might earn, continuously thinking, solving her problems and those of others, having no personal ambition, placing Christ first in her heart. (Other examples: Reggie White-athletic ability. Flannery O'Connor-writing.)

Thirdly, Paul tells us to look with hope to the future. "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Paul wants us to hold on to this promise. We usually think of John Calvin as a severe, stern man. But listen to what he wrote, over 400 years ago, concerning this promise. "Lest...(believers) should lose spirit from realizing their own weakness and become despondent, he takes the opportunity of giving them new heart from the comforting thought that their works are not now exacted according to the strict rule of the law, but that God forgives their impurity and accepts them with kindness and indulgence. The yoke of the law cannot be borne without breaking and crushing those who carry it. It remains, therefore, for believers to flee to Christ and implore His help as the defender of their liberty."

In other words, Paul exhorts us: Don't be discouraged! Don't be despairing! Sin will not lord it over us. We're no longer trying to satisfy the demands of law. We no longer regard God as our stern judge. God is the lover of our souls. The Christian life is not an intolerable burden to bear. It contains a promise that God intends to make us all that we were meant to be. "Sin will have dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

This promise doesn't mean that we'll never sin again or that sin shall never again exercise any power over us. But it's a promise that sins shall, one day, no longer exercise any dominion over us. It's a promise that through the proper use of the means of grace sin will progressively be defeated in our lives.

So...let's review what Paul has been saying.

1. We're accepted into a right relationship with God through faith in Christ apart from anything we do or can do. Do you trust in Christ alone to put you right with God?
2. If we have then we're assured of God's continuing grace which guarantees our final victory and our sharing in God's glory and...
3. We have died to sin and have come alive in Christ; we have renounced our old slave master sin and freely embraced Christ as our new slave master; we've been released from that old abusive relationship with sin and have entered into a relationship of mutual love, honor and respect with Christ.

Given all this how can we even think of continuing to sin? Far from continuing to sin we will do all that Christ tells us. We will-

1. Reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ;
2. Present ourselves and all that we have to Christ to be used for his kingdom;
3. Hold fast to the promise that sin, one day, will have no dominion over us or over this world.