

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a critical question. It arises from something I've heard many people say. Christians sin in word, thought, or deed everyday. My question is this, **"Is that true?"** Do Christians sin in word, thought, or deed everyday?

The fact is that many do. But the fact also is that they don't have to. Don't take my word for it. But do take Paul's in Romans 6:1-14. He teaches here that we can conquer sin and explains how. It's by downsizing it, and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Live with Sin

Let's start with a word that Paul uses in 8 of the 14 verses, **"sin."** He means by that the impulses, urges, and inclinations to evil that reside in our minds, hearts, and bodies. A Christian I met told me, for no constructive reason, what a horrible person her church's secretary is. The inclination to evil, gossip, obviously resides in her.

That's what sin is and in this text, Paul reveals how Christians can handle it. It's in one of two ways.

The first way is found in the opening line of verse 12, **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body."** That command clearly implies that Christians can do otherwise, which is in fact the case. Many let sin reign in their bodies and lives. Or to say it another way, they learn to live with it. A man I knew developed a sudden ringing in his ears. After a battery of tests, a specialist finally told Him: **"There's nothing we can do about it. You'll just have to live with it."** So that's what he's doing. He's living with it. Many Christians are doing the very same thing when it comes to sin. They're just living with it.

A cute little bookmark illustrates what that means. It's adorned with flowers, bows, green sprigs, and fourteen tiny pink hearts with a tassel at the top. In the center is a wide-eyed teddy bear that looks as if it just got caught doing something naughty. Underneath is the widely used

slogan, **“Christians aren’t perfect; just forgiven.”**

That shows what it means to live with sin. We don’t focus on controlling *it*. We focus on controlling *its effects* instead. We resign ourselves to the fact that we’re going to sin. But we limit the effects of that sin by immediately seeking and getting forgiveness.

That’s what many Christians do and the inevitable consequence is what I began with. They sin in thought, word, or deed pretty much everyday. Their persons and lives end up being pretty much the same as those of non-Christians. They lie, covet, divorce, lust, get angry, gossip, and so on as non-Christians do. They’re living with sin.

Conquer Sin

But there’s a second way that Christians can handle sin. Conquer it. Look at the strong vigorous language Paul uses in this text: (1) Verse 2 – **“died to sin”**; (2) Verse 6 – **“sin might be done away with”** and **“no longer slaves of sin”**; (3) Verse 7 – **“freed from sin”**; (4) Verse 11 – **“dead to sin”**; (5) Verse 12 – **“do not let sin reign”**; and (6) Verse 14 – **“sin shall not be master over you.”** Those are synonymous statements that teach us the same thing. We can conquer sin.

Paul explains why we can in verses 3-7. It’s because the Holy Spirit regenerates us. When we decide to follow Jesus, we’re united with Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection. That means we enter into an experiential union with Him. In that union, the Holy Spirit does something in us that is like what He did to the body of Jesus in raising it. He regenerates us. He brings a new power, a kingdom power, into us and sustains it there. At that point, we have two powers in us, each of which we’re capable of turning to – a sin power and a greater kingdom power.

With this kingdom power now available to us, we don’t have to just live with sin. By turning to it, we’re able to conquer sin. We aren’t limited to just controlling its effects. We can actually control it.

Let me illustrate. A celebrated televangelist pictured the difference between Christians and non-Christians this way. The non-Christian gets

mad, retaliates, and feels good about it. The Christian gets mad, retaliates, and feels bad about it. Consequently, he asks both God and the person he retaliated against to forgive him.

Notice what the Christian pictured does. He focuses on controlling the effects of sin. His emphasis is on forgiveness.

But verses 1-14 focus on controlling the sin itself. Paul would picture the difference this way. The non-Christian gets mad, retaliates, and feels good about it. The Christian doesn't get mad and retaliate but stays calm and blesses instead. He conquers the inclination to anger and revenge that reside in him.

That then is how we should handle sin. Don't live with it. Conquer it. Don't focus on controlling its effects. Focus on controlling it. That doesn't mean we'll ever be perfect, sinless, because we won't. But let's face it, there's a lot of room between "just forgiven" and "perfect." And as we live from the kingdom power in us, we'll continually move further from "just forgiven" and closer to "perfect." We'll eventually, over the years, get to the point that sin is the exception and righteousness the rule in our persons and lives – that God and people can count on us to be and do what is right. Or to put it in the terms with which I began. We won't sin in word, thought, or deed everyday.

Downsize Sin in Our Thinking

Now that we know what we should do, conquer sin, let's examine what our part in that is. The Holy Spirit's primary part is to create and sustain the kingdom power in us. Our part is to turn to that power by pursuing God hotly, as I explained it last week, and by downsizing sin. Downsizing sin might sound strange to you but that's exactly what we have to do – in two ways, both of which I want to discuss.

The first way, in verse 11, is in our thinking.

Notice the word "**consider**" here, also translated "**reckon**." The Greek word translated that means to purposely think about something in a certain way. In this case, that something is sin and God.

According to verse 11, there are two ways that we can think in that regard. First, we can think we're alive to sin and dead to God, which makes sin an irresistible force. Or second, we can think we're alive to God and dead to sin, which makes sin a controllable force.

Years ago, a long established Christian came to my office and said, **"I have a bone to pick with you."** He recalled some of the things I had said in sermons like eliminate anger as a way of relating to people, care nothing for the praise of others, and rejoice when our competitors succeed. He told me in no uncertain terms that the things I preached couldn't be attained and explained why. **"We're only human,"** he said, **"And can't live the kind of life you're always talking about."** He concluded by declaring how "frustrating" my expectations were. I responded by saying two things.

First, Christians aren't **"only"** human. We're united with Jesus in the likeness of His resurrection. A kingdom power resides in us as a result that's greater than the sin power in us. So yes, we are human. But we aren't **"only"** human in the sense that non-Christians are.

Second, the expectations I have aren't mine. They're God's. I quoted verse 7 and pointed out that God, not I, says that we're **"freed from sin."** He, not I, says eliminate anger, care nothing for the praise of others, rejoice when our competitors succeed, and so on.

Going back to verse 11, that Christian and I represent two different ways of thinking about sin and God. He thinks we're alive to sin, bound by it. I think we're dead to sin, free from it. He thinks we're dead to God, only human. I think we're alive to God, in union with Jesus more than only human. Or to say it another way, he upsizes sin in his thinking. He considers it an irresistible force that we're subject to. But I downsize sin in my thinking. I consider it a controllable force that we, by turning to the kingdom power in us, are able to conquer.

How we think in that regard is decisive. If we upsize sin and consider it irresistible, we'll resign ourselves to it. We'll just live with it. But if we downsize it and consider it controllable, we'll try to conquer it.

How we think about it determines how we handle it.

So let's downsize sin in our thinking. That's what Paul does in this text and so should we.

Downsize Sin in Our Acting

There's a second way we need to downsize sin – in our acting. In verse 12, Paul commands us not to let sin reign in our bodies. He then particularizes that command in verse 13. On the negative side, don't present our body parts as instruments of unrighteousness. Don't use them to do evil things. On the positive side, do present them as instruments of righteousness. Do use them to good things.

The fact that Paul commands us to do that implies that we're able to, which teaches us this. Because we have the kingdom power of Jesus in us, obeying Him isn't as difficult as most of us make it out to be. I was with a group of pastors, one of whom prayed: **"Oh Lord, doing what the world wants is so easy but doing what you want is so hard. Help us."** But I disagree.

Don't get me wrong. All of us have inclinations to certain evils that are so strong we can't resist them. If someone spit in our faces, for instance, most of us would get mad and retaliate. We don't have the direction freedom not to feel and act that way. But we do have the indirect freedom not to. Pursue God hotly, as I explained it last week. As we do that, practice spiritual disciplines that address the issues of getting mad and retaliating. The Holy Spirit will transform us if we do so that we'll eventually conquer that sin; so that we'll eventually not feel and act that way.

But having said that, I'd also say this. In most cases, doing good and not evil isn't usually as difficult as we make it out to be.

Dallas Willard shares a testimony that illustrates what I mean. Willard was thoughtlessly dishing up a second helping of a casserole. It was one of those casseroles with the three essential food groups – fat, salt, and cholesterol. Anyway, his son, who had heard him comment that

he wanted to shed 40 pounds, spoke up and said: **“Dad, I don’t think you want to do that.”** **“You’re right,”** Willard replied and put down the spoon. What’s instructive is his analysis of what he did. He writes about it: **“A skirmish with gluttony was simply and quietly defeated – without drama or heroic will power.”**

That’s what most of our temptations to sin are. They’re skirmishes with evil that don’t take heroic will power to overcome. Doing good and not evil isn’t usually as difficult as we make it out to be. It usually doesn’t take the wisdom and strength we think it does. All it takes is the intent to obey God. We purposely do what He says. I mentioned last week that this is one of the ways we give attention to Him and it is. We purposely do what He says. First, we learn what He says. Second, we recognize when the occasions arise to do what He says. And third, we assert our regenerated selves and do it. Examples abound.

Take, for instance, what Jesus calls **“the look”** in Matthew 5:28. First, I learn what Jesus says. Don’t look to lust. Second, a Victoria’s Secret commercial comes on and I recognize it as an occasion to do what He says. Third, thinking about Him, I assert my regenerated self and look away. Do that enough times and it eventually becomes a habit. Men are so sight oriented that most of us think we can’t do what Jesus says in Matthew 5:28. But we can. When that commercial comes on, what we face is simply a skirmish with lust that we can quietly defeat – without all that much drama or heroic will power. Our regenerated self and our hot pursuit of God make it that.

Conclusion

A few weeks ago, I ordered a number 1 from the Wendy’s menu. The clerk asked when I did, **“Would you like to supersize that?”** That helps us understand by way of analogy what the devil does. He wants us to live with sin. So he gets us to supersize it, to make it more than it is. But don’t play his little game. Don’t supersize sin. Downsize it in your thinking and acting instead. You’ll conquer it if you do.