**Go and sin no more**

We have been redeemed, Jesus is our intercessor in the throne room of heaven, taking the penalty for our sin upon himself.

Through the crucified Christ we get deliverance from the guilt of sin, our sins are all blotted out, we are free from all condemnation, and it is through the risen Christ that we get daily victory over the power of sin.[[1]](#footnote-1)

I want to follow up on last week’s sermon about Jesus interceding for us in heaven and how his sacrifice was sufficient to pay for our sins past, present and future.

There are two times in the Gospels when Jesus tells people to “go and sin no more.” One is after Jesus healed the man by the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:14) and the other is after He rescued the woman caught in adultery from getting stoned to death (John 8:11).

John 8:11 *Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’*

But the realist in us recognises that despite that injunction and against our best intentions, we continue to fall into the trap of sin.

Whilst we are positionally and potentially new creatures in Christ, practically we are still doing the old things, still wandering in the wilderness and getting nowhere.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We are not Sinners because we commit sinful acts; rather we commit sinful acts because we are sinners.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Yet Paul echoes our thoughts.

Romans 7:19-25 *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

The unknown author of the ancient manuscript “The Cloud of Unknowing” was also a realist:

However much you fasted, however long you stayed awake, however early you rose, however hard the bed you lay on, however harsh the garment you wore, yes, and, were it permissible (as it is not), if you should put out your eyes, cut the tongue out of your mouth, stop up your ears and nose as firmly as possible, even if you should slice off your private parts and cause your body all the pain you could think of, none of this would help you at all. The stirring and rising of sin will still be in you. [[4]](#footnote-4)

But this inability to stop sinning does not mean we have a licence to continue sinning without worrying about it, using the claim that all my sins are forgiven so I can continue sinning with impunity.

The name of this supposed freedom is antinomianism. An antinomian is one who takes the principle of salvation by faith and divine grace to the point of asserting that the saved are not bound to follow the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments. For the ancient Gnostics, they believed that freedom from law meant freedom for license.

Paul rebukes such a thought in Romans 6:1

*What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?*

We live in an age of Christian Triumphalism, where we posture ourselves as saints without sin, but that attitude in churches makes it hard for people to acknowledge that they are sinful beings or being comfortable or brave enough to confess their sins.

Richard Foster, famous author of many books on prayer writes to that same tune: All too often view is that the believing community is a fellowship of Saints rather than see it as a fellowship of sinners. We may feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. But if we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners, we are free to hear the unconditional call of God's love and to confess our needs openly before our brothers and sisters. We know then that we are not alone in our sin.[[5]](#footnote-5)

What I want to talk about today is Habitual sin.

I am not talking today about the occasional slip up, but I am talking about habitual behaviour, Behaviour that causes Jesus to say, “Go and sin no more.”,

Habitual sin refers to a repeated practice of thoughts or actions contrary to God's commands, and the Bible emphasizes the importance of recognizing and overcoming such behaviours.

The Bible crassly describes it this way

Proverbs 26:11 *As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly*.

The Greek poet Ovid identified that we know and approve the better and do the worse.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Apostle John calls it as it is. 1 John 1:8 *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

What’s so bad about habitual sin? There are consequences for that behaviour.

Brain science has identified that when we habitually do things, it creates a hardwired motorway in our heads that becomes our default thinking. The more we do a particular action, the more embedded in our brains is that motorway.

The more frequently a particular neural circuit is activated, the more robust it becomes, making the associated behaviour increasingly automatic.

If it is a good thing, great. But if it is a bad habit, it is hard to break free from.

When we repeatedly act in a particular way, our brain and mind align with that behaviour, embedding it into our sense of self. This identity-habit feedback loop makes change especially challenging. As an example, quitting smoking is not merely a physical withdrawal from nicotine; it requires a fundamental shift in self-image—from smoker to non-smoker.

And worse is to come for believers.

1. It leads to Spiritual Hardening:

The Bible tells us that continual sin dulls the conscience.

Ephesians 4:18 *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.*

The Old and New Testaments describes us as being a stiff-necked people

Acts 7:51: "*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit".*

2 Chronicles 30:8: *"Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the Lord".*

Overexposure to sin deadens the moral pain that would cause us to mourn rather than blame. Instead of leading to repentance, it fosters excuses.[[7]](#footnote-7)

It distances us from God

1. Which leads to Inhibited Fellowship:

1 John 1:6, *If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true*

The relational closeness that believers should enjoy with God is hindered when sin is constantly repeated without repentance.

When we have habitual sin, we come to church and put on a mask, hiding what we are ashamed of. But that mask works two ways, we hide but we also it blocks fellowship with God and others and cannot be free to accept love from God and others in the congregation.

Doug Webster speaks on this very thing: When a culture disowns moral responsibility and places the blame on someone other than the individual sinner, it becomes more and more difficult for individuals to be honest about their true spiritual condition. We see ourselves as a nation of victims, not sinners, in need of sympathy, not forgiveness.[[8]](#footnote-8)

By doing so, we misidentify our illness and feel we do not need to repent, so a wall comes up between us and God, and us and our fellow travellers.

1. Ultimately, it leads to Discipline from God:

God treats sin as a disease, because it is a disease. It is a contagious, defiling, but curable mortal sickness[[9]](#footnote-9)

Scripture shows that God, as a loving Father, corrects His children.

Hebrews 12:6, *the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.’*

Divine correction is intended to steer us back onto the right path. Hopefully that correction is in private and not in public, exposed in the tabloids.

We need to break the hold of habitual sin over us, and so avoid the divine correction.

That may seem impossible but all is not lost. We are not doomed to live in habitual sin.

Our excuse that “I cannot change, it is in my DNA, it is who I am” does not cut the mustard, because we have divine help to change.

We have a helper. The Holy Spirit helps us overcome habitual sin.

The Holy Spirit is depicted in Scripture as a divine Helper (John 14:26).

Galatians 5:16-17 *walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*

The Spirit convicts of sin and provides inner power to resist persistent wrongdoing.

Let me give you some practical steps toward freedom from habitual sin.

1. Confession:

1 John 1:9 promises that “*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*.”

We need to openly acknowledge sin before God. Do you want to do that privately God and you, or will you wait until it is publicly exposed?

We may not want to confess our sin to another person because they might think less of us, and we will feel exposed and vulnerable.

But if we don’t confess our sins, Satan has a hold over us because of that unconfessed sin.

Concealed sin keeps us from seeing the light of God. Sin is like spiritual leprosy. It deadens our spiritual senses so that we rip our soul to shreds and don't even feel it. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Henri Nouwen reminds us that to forget our sins may be an even greater sin than to commit them. What is forgotten cannot be healed and that which cannot be healed easily becomes the cause of greater evil.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. Accountability:

Biblical wisdom repeatedly stresses the importance of robust, godly relationships.

James 5:16 advises that we are to “*confess our trespasses to one another and pray for one another*.”

 In other words, having trustworthy fellow believers who speak truth into our lives helps guard against falling into habitual patterns.

Promisekeepers (the Men’s movement) recommends a 4x4 group – four men meeting regularly and accountable to one another, able to speak into each other’s lives. To ask the hard questions.

Accountability is hard because we fear our dark secrets being exposed but God knows them already, Satan is ready to accuse us of them. We need to deal with them.

As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins, everything remains in the dark but in the presence of a brother or sister, the sin is be brought into light (Bonhoeffer)[[12]](#footnote-12)

We need to have a mature Christian confidante who we can be real with, someone who demonstrates reliability, honesty, and support, whom we feel safe with for open communication and emotional connection. and whom we have given permission to speak into our blind spots, someone who loves us enough to want the best for us.

*For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

Baptist pastors are required to have a supervisor outside their church, whom they meet regularly.

Spiritual Directors, like me, are required to have a spiritual director over them, to enable us to process what is happening in our lives.

I offer spiritual direction sessions here for our congregation, free from cost. Others have to pay. A place of confidential discussion about being real before God.

3 Prayer and Scripture Engagement:

Consistent prayer and Scripture reading transforms our thinking. Memorizing relevant passages and short verses can be a powerful tool.

Just as I mentioned that habitual sin becomes a motorway in our brain, we can train our minds to seek other paths and strengthen those paths to replace the motorway and in fact become the new good motorway, leaving the old sin motorway to become nothing but an abandoned road, a road not travelled anymore.

The wise counsel of the Cloud of Unknowing points out: Just as you can see that if there is a spot of dirt on your bodily face, your bodily eye cannot perceive that spot or know where it is without a mirror or instruction from outside itself, so it is spiritually. Without reading or hearing God’s word, it is impossible to human understanding for a soul that is blinded by sinful habits to see a spot of dirt in its conscience.[[13]](#footnote-13)

1. Renewed Mind:

Romans 12:2 2 *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect*

This renewal involves consciously replacing sinful habits with godly pursuits.

Every sinful act is committed twice: once in our head's and once in our behaviour. To win the behaviour battle, we must first win the battle that takes place in our minds. [[14]](#footnote-14)

It is interesting that this scripture mentions discerning. Most people are unaware of the causes of their habitual sin – “It’s just the way I am!”

But as Peter Scazzero in his book Emotionally Health Spirituality identifies: Unhealed wounds open us up to habitual sin against God and others[[15]](#footnote-15)

Many recovery programs attempt to treat the presenting problem, whether that be alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, overeating. But without identifying the reason why people self-medicate, there will be no recovery.

Sin is real, and the cure is not to pretend that it doesn't exist or is a mere neurosis. The cure is repentance, the sorrow for our actions and for our separation from God that will lead to a radical reorientation of the life from self-indulgence toward God.[[16]](#footnote-16)

1. Dependence on God’s Strength:

*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!,* Paul proclaimed.

Philippians 4:13 says, “*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength*.”

Relying on divine power fosters hope that being released from ensnaring sin is truly possible.

If we had only a tinge of the sense of revulsion that God has towards sin, we would be moved to holier living[[17]](#footnote-17)

Through the crucified Christ we get deliverance from the guilt of sin, our sins are all blotted out, we are free from all condemnation; but it is through the risen Christ that we get daily victory over the power of sin.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Christ died for our sins – past present and future – but that does not mean we can continue to sin. He has provided a way out of that bind, though the Holy Spirit and through our fellow travellers in this Christian journey.

1. R A Torrey How to Succeed in the Christian Life 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John E Hunter Limiting God 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Richard Foster Prayer: finding the heart’s true home 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works- Page 35 | Loc. 1378-82 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Richard Foster Celebration of Discipline 183 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stuart Babbage The Mark of Cain 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Doug Webster The Easy Yoke 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Doug Webster The Easy Yoke 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Charles Spurgeon “Healing by the stripes of Jesus” Messages to the Multitude 217 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Piper Desiring God 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Henri Nouwen Making All things new and other classics 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Richard Foster Celebration of Discipline 186 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works. Page 58 | Loc. 1749-52 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Charles Stanley The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life 91 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Peter Scazzero Emotionally Health Spirituality109 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gary Moon & David Benner Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices Loc. 599-600 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Richard Foster Celebration of Discipline 187 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. R A Torrey How to Succeed in the Christian Life 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)