

Last week we heard how the Apostle Paul dealt with the common human reality that there are times when we know what is right- we want to do what is right – yet choose to do what is wrong. This means we approach Romans chapter 8 with a clear reminder that we will continue to sin as we let ourselves and God down.

We are immediately confronted by the extraordinary extravagance of God’s love - as Paul tells us “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” Before we move further into this passage we should pause (much as we would do on a hike when we have suddenly come upon an amazing view) and reflect on this phrase which sums up so much of the gospel.

The phrase “in Christ Jesus” is used by Paul to refer to anyone who has identified with Jesus in his death and resurrection -all of us who have recognised that Jesus is the Saviour we need and have decided to follow him as Lord, have received new birth by his Spirit – in short, every Christian. Paul recognises that the old era of trying and failing to live up to God’s standard has not been replaced by us now always succeeding to live the life we try to do but by the knowledge that our failure is always forgiven.

During Lockdown we have tried to support local businesses by having a take away once a week. Often one of the children will order and ask for my debit card when they come to pay. I always insist that they don’t allow the restaurant or Deliveroo to store my card details – it wouldn’t take many extra purchases to drain my account. IN the film, “Pretty Woman”, there is a point where Richard Gere (Who is unimaginably rich) hands Julia Roberts his credit card to go clothes shopping in expensive shops. This sounds like an incredibly dangerous thing to do, but he has so much money that no matter what she spends it doesn’t make a dent in his wealth.

Most of us think of God’s forgiveness as limited in the same way that my bank account is limited, so we hear the promise of forgiveness but look at the frequency of what we have done wrong – or the enormity of it – and fear we are getting close to draining the bank of God’s forgiveness. The effectiveness of Jesus death on the cross is such that we can refer more to the model of Julia Roberts spending on Richard Gere’s account – we know that even the worst sins we have committed - and even the repeated sins which we feel wretched about - cannot bring us within sight of the end of God’s forgiveness

It is not that sin doesn’t matter – it does! It is not that God doesn’t care about us changing – he does! But, in Jesus, we leave the past behind us and look forwards, rather than being tied to trying to make amends for the past.

During Lockdown the government introduced mortgage and rent holidays. The problem is that these debts stay with us and there will be some families living in dread that they are building up a debt they can never pay, and which will haunt them for the rest of their lives. Imagine, in that situation if the landlord’s son turned up at the door and said “I have set up a special account that has paid all your past debt and, whenever you fall short on the rent, it will make up the difference” That is a picture that begins to point us to what God’s forgiveness in Jesus is like. Past, present and future sins have been dealt with and there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When we move from one country to another we move from one legal system, one jurisdiction, to another. If I take my car by ferry from England to France – when I come off the ferry the laws have changed – I have to drive on the other side of the road, the speed limits have changed and there are rules about carrying a hi viz jacket and self-Breathalyzer which didn't apply in England. Paul describes becoming a Christian as moving from one jurisdiction to another.

WE find the old jurisdiction in what we now call the Old Testament. From the beginning, the purpose of God's people was to live in a loving relationship with God and to reflect the character, nature and power of God to the rest of the world. The basic principle was that God took a group of people who would trust solely in him and model his character in their lives. God's part was that he would build them up to be something they could never be in their own strength. Through them, God would be revealing himself to the rest of the world so that others too would turn to follow him. God gave these people two things – he gave them laws which illustrated how we would act if He was in their situation; and he gave the sign of circumcision as a reminder that if they failed to be the trusting people they should be – he would cut them off from his presence and his blessing.

The problem Paul identified was that even the best of us will always fail to live up to the law – there is not one of us good enough for God's standards. The solution God provided was his own Son – he first lived to the standard of the old jurisdiction and then paid the penalty of our failure to do so on the cross. By His Spirit we are able to enter into the new jurisdiction where our relationship with God is based on him reaching out to us – not us being able to reach out to him.

The purpose of our lives hasn't changed from the original purpose: "to live in a loving relationship with God and to reflect the character, nature and power of God to the rest of the world." This is still the calling and challenge of all who call themselves Christian. What has changed in the new jurisdiction is that we are motivated by love and not fear – and we are empowered by the Spirit and not our own strength.

So Paul could say: "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." (v.11)

The passage started with the encouragement that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" and it ends with the encouragement that it is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead that is equipping us to live the life we have been called to. The **consequence** of our sin is dealt with by the generous and unlimited forgiveness of God through Jesus; and the **cause** of our sin is dealt with by the Holy Spirit who is the power of God through Jesus to enable us to live his new life.