

The talk for morning worship is based on Romans 6 verses 1B to 11.

This morning I want to talk to you about sin. Sin. As Miranda Hart, the comedian, would say when trying to explain away some bizarre behaviour of hers, 'we all do it!' It's one thing that all Christians have in common. All people have in common.

As a child growing up in the 1950's I found the world was full of rules, that were written, regulated and punished by adults. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' was a familiar sign when out walking. Rules are made to be broken some would say. As a child when I attended Sunday school I was asked once by my Sunday school teacher what the word 'Amen' might mean. Everyone in my class made suggestions. Mine was, that it might mean that you weren't allowed to ride your bike on a Sunday. This this was something I just been told by my mother half an hour earlier.

I think at an early age I found authority, rules and punishment a bit annoying. Authority started with parents, particularly your father, through to the village policeman, teachers, all the way up to God the ultimate authority. Punishments ranged from a clip around the ear from your father or on one occasion a policeman, to the more formal getting the cane from the teachers at school and eternal damnation from God.

Our three-year-old grandson Elijah returned to nursery for the first time since lockdown last week. Naturally, he was very excited until his teacher Mrs. Hughes told them they were not allowed to touch one another at all. At home time he recounted all the exciting things he'd done that day to his mom, including strict instructions given to him by his teacher not to touch any other child. Then he said, "I did touch Harry with the end of my finger, but it was alright because Mrs. Hughes didn't see."

The obvious point Elijah missed was in knowing that some rules are there for our protection and well-being, but he got the confession right even if there wasn't any remorse.

At the beginning of the passage today we read, "shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase." In other words, as God loves us and loves to forgive us our sins why not use this, to sin all the more. As God's forgiveness is assured why not use our freedom to do whatever we want. Paul's answer is swift, 'by no means,' he said, 'we died to sin.' To think like this is to trivialise Jesus's death for our sin.

In Saint Paul's time baptism was by full immersion in a river. So, when people were baptised, they were actually buried under the water, dead to their old sinful way of life to rise again into a new life with Christ. They rose out of the water, symbolically resurrected into a new life with Christ.

The temptation to sin is always with us so what's the answer? In the political world today, it seems the answer is to make evermore complex laws and regulations to follow. The Pharisees, in Jesus' time had a very similar idea of evermore complex laws and rules for everyone to obey.

What is the answer then? Paul sums it up in Galatians 5:13, "you my brothers were called to be free but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature rather serve one another in love; the entire law is summed up in the single command love your neighbour as yourself. And how should we be able to do that? 'Live by the Spirit' Gal. 5:16