

"REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE"

(Romans 6:1-23)

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Looking back over Romans 6, we recall that both its halves begin with an almost identical question: "Shall we go on sinning?" (1) and "Shall we sin?" (15). This question was posed by Paul's detractors who intended by it to discredit his gospel; it has been asked ever since by the enemies of the gospel; and it is often whispered in our ears today by that most venomous of all the gospel's enemies, the devil himself. As in the Garden of Eden he asked Eve, "Did God really say, 'You must not ...?'" so he insinuates into our minds the thought, "Why not continue in sin? Go on! Feel free! You are under grace. God will forgive you."

Our first response must be the outraged negative, "God forbid!" "By no means!" But then we need to go further and confirm this negative with a reason. For there is a reason (solid, logical, irrefutable) with which to rebut the devil's devious arguments and with which at the same time Paul brings his high theology down to the level of practical everyday experience. It is the necessity of remembering who we are, on account of our conversion (inwardly) and our baptism (outwardly). We are one with Christ (6:1-14), and we are slaves of God (6:15-23). We became united to Christ by baptism and enslaved to God by the self-surrender of conversion. But whether we emphasize baptism or faith, the point is the same. Being united to Christ, we are "dead to sin but alive to God" (11), and being enslaved to God we are *ipso facto* committed to obedience (16), pledged to "the total belongingness, the total obligation, the total commitment and the total accountability which characterize the life under grace". It is inconceivable that we should go back on this by willfully persisting in sin and presuming on grace. The very thought is intolerable, and a complete contradiction in terms.

So, in practice, we should constantly be reminding ourselves who we are. We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: "Don't you know? Don't you know the meaning of conversion and baptism? Don't you know that you have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection? Don't you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to his obedience? Don't you know these things? Don't you know who you are?" We must go on pressing ourselves with such questions, until we reply to ourselves: "Yes, I *do* know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly."

On 28 May 1972 the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris. The same evening a television program rehearsed the main events of his life. Extracts from earlier films were shown, in which he answered questions about his upbringing, brief reign and abdication. Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said: "My father [King George V] was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me saying, 'My dear boy, you must always remember who you are.'" It is my conviction that our heavenly Father says the same to us every day: "My dear child, you must always remember who you are."

