

Overcoming the Reign of Sin

Romans 6:12-14

- 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.
- 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.
- 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Are you serious about saying "No" to sin? One of the marks of a Christian is overcoming the world. 1 John 5:4 says, **"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith."** John describes the love of the world as **"the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life"** (1 John 2:16). Overcoming the world, then, is overcoming the ongoing practice of sin. It is saying "No" to sin.

This is what Paul is teaching us in Romans 6-8. This is a section all about sanctification, the process of God making us holy like our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 6:22 says, **"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."**

Paul is writing this section so that we would be free from the power of sin so that we could be holy, sanctified. But don't forget where we have been so far in Romans. Remember that Paul has written five chapters on God, sin, and justification. Paul does not teach us how to do battle with sin until we have learned how Christ has done battle with sin first and how He did what we could not do and what the law could not do. Christ justified us by His death and resurrection. We receive that gift of being right with God and the forgiveness of our sins by faith in Jesus Christ.

Justification by faith is utterly essential as a foundation for doing battle with sin! You cannot fight sin successfully until you know your sin is forgiven. You don't make yourself holy in order to be justified. You are justified by faith in order to become holy. That is why we must understand the truth of Romans 1-5 before we get to Romans 6. Your triumph over sin in the body depends upon Christ's triumph over sin on the cross.

So having thoroughly laid out the work of God through Christ in justification, Paul now explains how we live a justified life in sanctification. Sanctification is simply our growth in holiness that continues until we are perfected in Christ's presence. It living out the effects of the gospel in daily life.

It is important for us to understand what we aim for in sanctification. Let me first point out what sanctification is not. Sanctification is not getting converted all over again. We are not trying to achieve more righteousness before God. We are not trying to add to the work of Christ as though His work was deficient. We are not trying to get into better favor with God. We are not attempting to earn forgiveness of sins. We are not trying to finish where Christ left off.

Rather, sanctification is the progressive growth in holiness in this life depending completely on what Christ has done for us in His death and resurrection. It is enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is helped and encouraged by the body of Christ. It is God making us in practice what we already are in position.

So that is why our first step in overcoming sin is to:

1. Count Yourself Dead to Sin and Alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11).

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 11, contains the very first command in the book of Romans. The verb “reckon” is a present active imperative verb. For you non-English majors, an imperative is a command. It is something that Paul is calling us to do. And this is the very first one in Romans.

The commands in 6:11-14 rest on the truths that Paul has set forth in the first five and a half chapters of Romans. As John Murray explains it, to say to a slave, “Don’t behave as a slave,” is to mock his slavery. But to say to a freed slave, “Don’t behave as a slave” is to encourage him to act in light of his new freedom. To say to a person outside of Christ, “Stop sinning” is futile. To say it to a person whom Christ has freed from sin is meaningful and helpful. The commands that Paul gives in here make no sense unless you are in Christ by virtue of being justified by faith alone.

So the first step to overcoming sin is to count it to be true in your life what Christ has done for you and in you. What do we count to be true in us? Christ died for our sins (6:10). We died with Him (6:5-6). God united us to Christ through our faith (6:5, 8). God justifies us because of our union with Christ (6:7). He counts our sins as punished in Christ and Christ’s righteousness as credited to us.

Being dead to sin is not a feeling that you will achieve someday when you are spiritually mature. It is a spiritual truth that you must believe and act on, often in opposition to your feelings and lusts. It is true because of your union with Jesus Christ.

Count on it. Depend on it. Consider it to be the truest thing about you. Reckoning ourselves to have died and risen with Christ is believing it and embracing it with all its promises as precious beyond all earthly things.

2. Refuse to let sin rule over you (6:12-13a).

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin,

These verses describe the scene of a battle. In chapter 7 we will see how personal and real the battle with sin can be for each of us. John Piper describes the battlefield this way:

Verse 12: There is a throne or a reign. **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body."**

Verse 12: There is a challenger to the throne: sin. **"Do not let sin reign."**

Verse 12: There is a castle where sin threatens to reign: the human body.
"your mortal body."

Verse 12: You are capable of obedience to disloyal desires. **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires."**

Verse 13: There is a true king on the throne who has the reign in the castle: God. **"present yourselves to God."**

Verse 13: There are weapons in the castle that can be used to advance the cause of the true king, God, or the cause of the pretender to the throne, sin: members [parts] of the human body. **"Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments [weapons] of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments [weapons] of righteousness to God."**

Verse 14: There is a constitutional authority in the kingdom: grace, not law.
"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

The imperative, "do not let sin reign," is a present tense verb, meaning that this is not a one-time achievement of victory but rather a daily dealing with sin's reign. We are never to give the impression that sin is king in our lives instead of Jesus Christ. That means that we must be decisive each day in not letting sin reign.

Paul personifies sin as an evil tyrant that will reign over you and lead to death (6:21, 23) if you let it. It's like living with a little bit of cancer. You can't do it, because the cancer will spread and kill you. You've got to eradicate it all.

In the same way, you can't tolerate a little bit of sin or think that you can use it safely to pursue your happiness. Men, you can't tolerate a little bit of pornography. Jesus said (Matt. 5:27-30) that if you do not cut the lust out of your life, you'll spend eternity in hell. And Paul seems to line up with Jesus here in Romans 6 when he says that if you are a slave of sin, the outcome will be death, which is opposed to eternal life (6:20-21, 23).

Sin seeks to dominate us through our bodies.

Paul commands, **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body."** The Bible affirms that our bodies are good, that physical pleasure within the boundaries of God's Word is to be enjoyed, and that we are to use our bodies to glorify God (Prov. 5:15-19; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:3-4; 6:17).

Paul uses the terms "mortal body" and "members of your body" because the way the lusts of the heart manifest themselves is through our physical bodies. Leon Morris explains, "Paul is not arguing that the body is the cause of sin, but that it is the organ through which sin manifests itself, *so that* believers obey it."

For sin to reign, you must allow it to reign by giving your body to it as a weapon for unrighteousness.

"Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness" (6:13a). As we said, the word translated *instruments* means *weapons* (John 18:3; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4).

- The desire for food (hunger) is a God-given desire, but when sin captures it, the desire becomes gluttony or bulimia or anorexia and it rules us for

the sake of the enemy, and our stomach becomes a weapon of unrighteousness.

- The thirst is a natural desire, but when sin captures it, the desire may become alcoholism or caffeine addiction, and our body becomes a weapon of unrighteousness.
- The desire for sexual satisfaction is a good servant of procreation and joy in marriage, but if sin captures it, the desire becomes lust for pornography or fornication or adultery or homosexual relations, and the members of our bodies become the weapons of unrighteousness.
- We have a desire for rest and sleep that is good for us, but if sin captures it, the desire becomes sloth and laziness.

The struggle against sin is mortal combat against an enemy that seeks to destroy you (Eph. 6:10-20). Picture yourself in combat with an assailant who has broken into your house. As he wrestles with you, he drops his gun. You pick it up and hand it back to him. That's how stupid it is when you give your body to sin as a weapon for unrighteousness!

I read about a young man who professed to be a Christian, but he was enslaved to some sin. He had been to many counselors, and they spent hours trying to help him analyze his past and trying various techniques, but nothing had worked. He shared this tale of woe with a campus worker and finally asked, "What do you think I should do?" The campus worker replied, "I think you should stop doing it." The young man was stunned. He said, "In all these years, no one told me to stop sinning." He didn't realize that that was an option!

Sin is a tyrant that will reign over you if you let it do so. Refuse to let sin reign.

3. Surrender yourself to God (6:13b).

Resisting sin by taking specific action against it is only half of the equation. The other, the positive side, means that we consciously give ourselves to the Lord and consciously give the members of our body as instruments of righteousness for the glory of God.

present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God

The word present here is a term of sacrifice. It is the same word used in Romans 12:1 when Paul says, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** It is surrendering, yielding, presenting as a sacrifice yourself to God. Surrender here is not, "Just let go and let God." Rather, to stop sinning *you* must take aggressive action to deny its attempt to rule your life. It's an act of your will.

A Christian was traveling by train and found himself in a car with three non-Christians who wanted to pass the time playing poker. Lacking a fourth to complete the game, they invited the Christian to join them. "I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, "but I cannot join your game for I have not brought my hands with me." "Whatever do you mean" they asked in bland astonishment. He replied, "This pair of hands does not belong to me, they belong to the Lord."

Presenting yourself to God implies a recognition that you are altogether His. This giving of yourselves is a definite thing.

It is a choice. To choose is to prefer one thing over another thing. You are dead to sin and its desires; they do not look preferable. When sin sends desires to tempt you, prefer God. See God as preferable to the fleeting pleasures of sin. You are alive to God and He looks preferable.

In other words, the way to say "NO" is by saying "YES." You say "No" to sin by saying "Yes" to Jesus. You had better learn this: don't focus on the sin! Focus on the Savior who has conquered the sin!

4. Depend on God's grace (6:14).

I could have devoted an entire message to verse 14, but I can only comment on it briefly. Paul adds this verse to give us the encouragement and incentive to fulfill the commands of 6:11-13. The first part of the verse is a promise, not a command: **"For sin shall not be master over you."** The second half explains the promise, **"For you are not under law but under grace."**

There is no such thing as a Christian who lives consistently under the lordship of sin. Christians live under the lordship of Christ.

The reason that Christians can live in victory over sin is that grace has the power to conquer sin. The law cannot keep us from sin. The law commands, but it contains no power to obey. But grace frees us from condemnation, motivates us by God's undeserved love, and empowers us by His Spirit, whom He freely gives to all who trust in Christ.

Sin will pick apart every flaw and failure of our lives, loudly condemning us for our sin. But the only ground that sin has to condemn is with the law and lawbreakers. But what has happened to the believer? He is no longer under the law as the means to righteousness! He is under grace because he is in Christ, relying upon the satisfaction of Jesus Christ in meeting the righteous demands of the law. So, sin's threats and condemnations are meaningless to the believer because we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the law (more on that in chapter 7) but rather we are under the jurisdiction of grace.

Does this mean that the believer can be careless with sin because he is under grace? That takes us back to the primary argument that the Apostle has given. "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" Grace does not encourage sin or give an excuse for sin but rather gives the believer courage to face sin in the triumph of Jesus Christ. To be "under grace" is to be in the sphere of the constant, faithful, reliable work of God who never stops until Christ is perfectly formed in us.

When I was in high school, I was not walking very closely with the Lord. My friends were not believers and I had many temptations to do the things that they were doing. My parents loved me, trusted me, and gave me a lot of freedom. I remember thinking sometimes when I was tempted, "I can't do that or I would hurt Mom and Dad." That's how God's grace works—you want to please the One who loved you and gave Himself up for you (Gal. 2:20).

If you've never experienced God's sin-conquering grace, I invite you to come to Jesus today. He will save you and give you the power to overcome sin. You *can* say no to sin and yes to the God who loved you and gave His Son to redeem you from your sins.