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IT AIN'T GONNA REIGN NO MORE

Romans 6:12-14

By

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Romans Lesson 33

It Ain't Gonna Reign No More Romans 6:12-14

Many of you have seen the hilarious Bob Newhart routine where he is a psychologist and a woman comes for counsel because she is afraid of being buried alive in a box. (If you haven't seen it, watch it on You Tube when you need a good laugh.) Newhart's counsel for her phobia, plus several other problems, consists of two words: "Stop it!" He screams it at her over and over, "Just stop it!" She tries to bring up how her mother treated her as a child, but Newhart says, "No, we don't go there. Just stop it!"

In some ways, Paul's command to those who are struggling with life-dominating sins sounds kind of like Bob Newhart's counsel: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts" (6:12). In other words, "Stop it!" Then after telling us to obey God, he gives a blanket promise (6:14a): "For sin shall not be master over you" It's pretty clear: "Stop sinning and obey God because sin shall not be master over you." Got it?

But as all of us know, overcoming stubborn, life-dominating sins is not as easy as just stopping it. Even though we often can see that these sins are having a destructive effect in our lives, we keep falling into them. So *how* do we stop it? How do we experience on a consistent basis the promise that sin "ain't gonna reign no more"?

As I said last week, I've been struggling to understand and apply the truths of Romans 6 for 45 years now, and it's still not easy. So I'm not suggesting in this message, "Take these three Bible verses and you'll feel fine in the morning." You're going to have to grapple with these truths until they become part of the fabric of your daily thinking and practice. My aim is to try to further your understanding and help direct you on the path. But you need actively to engage with this chapter because if you don't, your sin will destroy you. It's a life and death battle! In a nutshell, Paul says:

Don't let sin reign by following your lusts, but give yourself to God to live righteously under His grace.

Let's work through these verses under four headings:

1. To apply these commands, you must understand and apply the truths of Romans 1-6:11.

I am basing this observation on the opening word of verse 12, "Therefore." *Therefore* shows that the commands in 6:12-13 rest on the truths that Paul has set forth in the first five and a half chapters of Romans. If you have not understood and personally applied those truths, it would be as futile to apply the commands of 6:12-13 as it was for the woman in Bob Newhart's office to just stop it.

We've spent 32 messages in Romans so far, but let me recap Paul's main points. First, the universal human problem is, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Thankfully, God did not leave us under His judgment. He provided a way to preserve His justice and yet to justify sinners. He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the penalty that we deserved. God now graciously justifies the ungodly person who does not work for salvation, but rather believes in Jesus as his or her sin-bearer, thus reconciling us to God. Formerly, we were all identified with Adam in his sin. But now, having received God's free gift, we are united to Christ in His death to sin and resurrection life, which we will fully experience when He returns. In the meanwhile, whenever we are tempted to sin, we must "consider [ourselves] to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11).

Thus, as John Murray explains (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 227), 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 6:12-13 make no sense unless you are in Christ by virtue of being justified by faith alone.

2. Sin is a tyrant that will reign over us if we allow it to do so (6:12-13a).

Rom. 6:12-13a: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness" I'll try to explain these verses under four headings:

- A. Sin still has a strong appeal, even to those who are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's command in 6:12 shows that we were on target in 6:1-11 when we concluded that being identified with Christ in His death so that we are freed from sin does not mean that we are now sinlessly perfect or that we're immune to sin. Believers still feel strong desires ("lusts") for sin. When sin comes knocking, we don't automatically slam the door and say, "I'm not interested!" If that were so, Paul would not have given the command, "Do not let sin reign." 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 by virtue of your union or identification with Jesus Christ. But that union with Christ does not eradicate the lusts of the flesh.

- B. Sin's goal is not to assist you with your program for happiness and success.

We tend to think of sin as a benign force that we can manage and control. "If you eat the fruit, you will be like God." "Well, I've always wanted to be like God. That's a good personal goal, isn't it?" Satan presented sin as if it were a good thing that would assist Eve in her quest for happiness. But 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 that if you do, you will spend eternity in hell (Matt. 5:27-30). I wouldn't have put it so strongly. That seems to go against my theology that we're saved by grace through faith alone. But Jesus said 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).

On the news this week, they showed a fisherman holding a small shark that he had caught that was still alive and squirming in

his hand. Suddenly, it turned and took a chunk out of his shoulder. Sin is like that shark. As long as it's still alive in you, its aim is not to help you, but to destroy you.

C. Sin seeks to dominate us through our bodies.

Paul commands, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body." He adds that you should not present "the members of your body to sin." Also, several times in chapter 7 (verses 5, 18, 23, 24) Paul makes it sound as if sin resides in our bodies.

But we need to be very careful here. An early heresy (Gnosticism) taught that the body and all matter are evil, whereas the spirit is good. This led to one of two extremes: Some treated the body harshly, denying themselves proper food, warmth, and other comforts of life. They advocated abstaining from all pleasure, including that of marital relations, as the path to spiritual growth. But others reasoned, "If my body is already evil, then it doesn't matter what I do with it. It doesn't touch my spirit." So they indulged the flesh and justified it with their twisted logic.

The Bible, however, 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). Harsh treatment of the body is "of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col. 2:23).

Therefore, it is most likely that when Paul refers here to "your mortal body," he is looking at the whole person in terms of his interaction with the world (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 383; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* [Baker], p. 323). This is supported by the parallelism in verse 13, where Paul says not to present the members of your body to sin, but in the next line says to present yourselves to God. The "members of your body" seems to be synonymous with "yourselves." And the "lusts" of verse 12 are not limited to bodily desires, such as the desires for food and sex. They also include sins of the heart, such as envy, jealousy, anger, greed, and pride.

So Paul uses the terms "mortal body" and "members of your body" because the way these lusts of the heart manifest themselves is through our physical bodies. Leon Morris (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Apolllos/Eerdmans], p. 257, italics his) 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.”

Paul adds the word *mortal* to emphasize the fact that we all are going to die in a few short years. Sin is pleasurable for a season (Heb. 11:25), but it leads to *eternal* death (Rom. 6:23). The joy of being reconciled to God and the rewards of heaven are eternal. Thus it would be foolish to indulge the lusts of your mortal body for a few short years but lose the eternal joys of heaven. Rather, use your body to glorify God (1 Cor. 6:20).

D. 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). The word translated *instruments* can refer to tools or instruments, but elsewhere in the New Testament, it *always* means *weapons* (John 18:3; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4). And so most likely here Paul had in mind either giving your bodily parts over to Satan to use for weapons of unrighteousness, or giving them to God as weapons of righteousness.

The picture, then, is that the struggle against sin is mortal combat against an enemy that seeks to destroy you (Eph. 6:10-20). Bishop Lightfoot (*Notes on Epistles of St. Paul* [Baker], p. 297; I changed his Greek into English) put it this way: “Sin is regarded as a sovereign (*do not let it reign*, ver. 12), who demands the military service of subjects (*that you obey*, ver. 12), levies their quota of arms (*weapons of unrighteousness*, ver. 13), and gives them their soldier’s-pay of death (*wages*, ver. 23).” 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. Duh! That’s how stupid it is when you give your body to sin as a weapon for unrighteousness!

Thus, to apply these commands, you must understand and personally apply the truths of Romans 1-6:11. Also, realize that sin is a tyrant that will reign over you if you let it do so.

3. In Christ, exercise your will to say no to sin and yes to God (6:13b).

In Romans 6:1-11, Paul has appealed to the mind (“knowing,” 6:3, 6, 9) and to the heart (“consider,” or “reckon,” 6:11, which

depends on faith, which comes from the heart, Rom. 10:10). Now (in 6:12-13) he appeals to the will. He is saying, "Stop sinning and start obeying," but this appeal to the will rests on the knowledge of who you now are in Christ and on believing that truth when you face temptation. *Then* you must choose to act on it. Three thoughts:

A. We have an active responsibility to stop the reign of sin.

Paul directs the command to us and he doesn't say, "Just let go and let God." Rather, to stop sinning *you* must take aggressive action to deny its attempt to rule your life. This is where "just say no" is a valid motto. "Stop it!" You *can* obey that command because in Christ, the power of sin has been broken.

Years ago, 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!

But isn't that what Paul is telling us when he says, "Flee immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18)? Or, "Flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). Or, "Flee from youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). Fleeing is the opposite of hanging out with sin, let alone welcoming into your life. If movies defile you and put tempting thoughts in your brain, flee movies. If porn on the Internet tempts you, either put some big fences up so that you don't go near the edge or flee the Internet. This isn't rocket science!

B. Victory over sin begins by personally giving yourself to God.

"Present yourself to God." The first use of that verb with regard to sin is in the present tense: "do not go on presenting." But the second instance, with reference to God, is in the aorist tense, which leads some authors to emphasize that this is a once-for-all commitment. But Douglas Moo cautions against putting too much emphasis on the variation of verb tense here. He says (p. 385), "The aorist imperative often lacks any special force, being used

simply to command that an action take place—without regard for the duration, urgency, or frequency of the action.” He suggests that since *not* giving ourselves to sin is constantly necessary, so giving ourselves to God as our rightful ruler must be repeated often.

The verb, *present*, does not have the passive meaning of *yield*, but the more active meaning of *give in service to* (Moo, p. 384, note 168). This implies that our main reason for wanting to overcome sin should not be just our own happiness, but rather the glory of the God who sent His Son to redeem us. He bought us with His blood; therefore, we must glorify Him with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We now present ourselves to God as willing conscripts in His army for His purpose and glory. We will be happy when we give ourselves to God, but our primary aim is to glorify Him.

This is a big problem with the AA and 12-Step programs: they never dethrone self. God, “however you conceive Him to be,” is there to help you overcome your addictions so that you will be happy. But He is not presented as the Lord who loved you and bought you out of the slave-market of sin. Your motive for gaining the victory over sin should be to please the loving Lord who bought you with His blood. Give your bodily members to Him as weapons for righteousness.

- C. Victory over sin is only possible for those who are spiritually alive from the dead.

Paul says (6:13b), “Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.” You were dead in your sins, alienated from God as His enemy. But He made you alive in Christ through the new birth. This goes back to our first point, that to apply these commands, you must first understand and apply the truth of the gospel of justification by faith alone, which Paul expounds on in chapters 1-5. You must no longer be in Adam, under the reign of sin and death, but rather be in Christ, having received new life by His grace.

Unbelievers can become more outwardly moral by self effort. But it's like putting a tuxedo on a pig. It might look nice for a while, but you haven't changed the pig's nature. The first mud hole that it sees will be too tempting. To overcome the temptation, that pig needs a brand new nature. To overcome temptation on the

heart level, so that it doesn't work its way out through your bodily members, you must be alive from the dead through faith in Christ.

Thus, to apply these commands, you must understand and apply the truths of Romans 1-6:11. Sin is a tyrant that will reign over us if we let it do so. But in Christ, we now have the power to say no to sin and yes to God. Finally,

4. God promises victory over sin to those who are not under the law but under grace (6:14).

I could have devoted an entire message to verse 14, but I can only comment on it briefly. The subject of law and grace is one of the most difficult topics in all of Scripture. But Paul adds this verse to give us the encouragement and incentive to fulfill the commands of 6:12-13 (Murray, p. 228). 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."

The promise means that if you are not experiencing consistent victory over sin, either at worst you are not a genuine Christian or at best you do not understand the truths of Romans 6. While genuine Christians do fall into sin, sometimes into gross sins, they cannot remain there. They will be as unhappy in sin as a fish out of water. They will be miserable until they get right again with God. But there is no such thing as a Christian who lives consistently under the lordship of sin. Christians live under the lordship of Christ.

The explanation in the second half of 6:14 shows that grace has the power to conquer sin that the law lacks. This runs contrary to legalists who think that you've got to impose the law to keep people from sinning. Paul says just the opposite: the law brought the knowledge of sin (3:20; 7:7). "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase" (5:20). The Law arouses our sinful passions to bear fruit for death (7:5, 8-11). 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.

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 get drunk or get involved in sex. But 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). How can you love the evil that put your Savior on the cross?

Conclusion

If you've never experienced God's sin-conquering grace, He invites sinners to come to the cross and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). When you receive God's grace in Christ, the power of sin is broken. In Christ, you *can* just stop it! And you can present yourself to God as your new Master, who brought you from death to life. You *can* say no to sin and yes to the God who loved you and gave His Son to redeem you from your sins.

Application Questions

1. Why is it *essential* to understand and apply the truth of Romans 1-6:11 before you apply 6:12-13? What is the connection?
2. Discuss: Can a truly born again person be enslaved to some sin for all of his/her life? Support your answer with Scripture.
3. If we are dead to sin (6:3, 5, 6, 8), why does it have such a strong appeal, even years after we've been saved? What should we learn from this (1 Cor. 10:12-13)?
4. Some would argue that it is futile to tell a Christian who is enslaved to sin just to stop sinning. Is this valid biblically?

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