



Free to Fight Sin

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #37

Romans 6:11-14

David Sunday

April 24, 2016

In Romans 6:11-14 we find God's marching orders to fight against sin. Someone has called these verses "a trumpet call to active combat in the fight against sin." Let's pray together before we read God's Holy Word.

Heavenly Father, I thank You that Your Word is life, light and power. It brings freedom and liberty to the slaves. As we meditate on these wonderful truths, we pray that they would be potent in our hearts. May Your Spirit water them into our hearts and embolden us to fight the good fight of faith against indwelling sin with confidence that in Christ we are more than conquerors. The battle belongs to You, O Lord, and in You there is victory. We thank You for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Beginning at verse 11 of Romans 6:

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Thanks be to God for His living Word. Amen.

I'm not a big fan of Twitter, but occasionally something profound is said there. This tweet by Dane Ortlund is worth pondering: "My heart is like a country but half subdued. Mutinies and insurrections are daily happening." That's the truth of a Christian's heart. We are now new creations in Christ, but there is indwelling sin—and mutinies and insurrections are happening daily. As we think about fighting sin and look at today's very practical instructions, I want you to identify specifically one of those areas of "mutiny and insurrection" you feel rising up in your

heart in this present season. Think specifically about where you battle against sin—where you're facing a battle right now.

I wrote something in the margin of my notes that I'm going to be thinking about as we apply the truths of Romans 6. I want us to be thinking very specifically about how our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to fight. But I also want us to be encouraged that Christ not only mercifully cancels the guilt of our sin, but He also mightily conquers the power of our sin. These are both parts of the gospel Christ mercifully cancels our guilt, but He mightily conquers the power of our sin as well. This wonderful passage in Romans 6 is telling us that through Jesus we have the power to fight against sin's desire to dominate our lives.

I love how this passage is so practical. Basically it gives us a simple strategy. There's something we need to believe and think, there's something we need to be sure not to do, there's something we need to be sure to do, and then there's a reason, an encouragement, regarding why and how we can do this in our lives. I need that simplicity and I'm thankful the Bible is simple and clear.

1. An identity we need to embrace (verse 11)

This is in the area of believing or thinking. We saw this last week, but I don't want us to forget the importance of what Paul said in verses 1-11. So let's look at verse 11 once more: "*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" Paul here is not telling us something to *do*, but is speaking of who we *are*. Our identity, our status, has changed once we are in Christ. We are no longer in bondage to sin's dreadful dictatorship. Paul says the first thing we need to do is think about this often, considering this reality so it permeates our mind and captures our mindset. We realize we are new in Christ.

Last week I quoted Jerry Bridges. Let's read that once more:

It is important we understand what Paul is saying here because he is not telling us to do something but to believe something. We are to believe that we are dead through Christ to both sin's penalty and its dominion. But it is not something we make come true by believing it. We simply are dead to sin, whether we believe it or not.

Paul is not calling us to an exercise in make-believe. He says we are to subjectively believe something that is already objectively true. We need to line our thinking up with God's truth. What God says about us needs to become the way we think about ourselves. So we see this objective doctrinal truth in verse two: we died to sin in Christ. Then Paul went on to speak of our union with Christ, that when He died we died, when He was buried we were buried, and when He

was raised we were raised. This is the objective truth: Christians have died with Christ to sin's slave-driving, bullying power.

Now Paul is going to tell us that as a result of this objective truth there's a way we are to live. As you read your Bible, be looking for this pattern. There are two words that communicate this: indicative and imperative. We find these especially in the New Testament letters. An indicative speaks of something that is true—something that's an objective reality, a true doctrine. An imperative speaks of something we are called to do—a command. In the New Testament, these imperatives always flow out of indicatives. What God tells us to do always flows out of what He has done for us and the reality of who we are in Christ.

So the indicative in this passage is that we've been set free. Sin doesn't have dominion over us anymore. The imperative now is: act out your freedom. Live in that freedom. A Christian is dead to sin, so Paul says in verse 11 you must consider yourself dead to sin. Notice that living the Christian life is more than just being a moral person. It's not just knowing a lot about the Bible. It's not just being religious or going to church. It's different from that.

How do you know if you're dead to sin? You could be very much alive to sin. Sin could have a lot of power reigning over your life and still you could know a lot about the Bible. You could be very religious and very moral. The way you know you're dead to sin is not that you're moral or that you're perfect. That's not what Paul is talking about here. The way you know you're dead to sin is that you can no longer comfortably tolerate sin in your life. You've got a distaste for it. You see it as a disease. Yes, it still rises up in you and you have to battle against it, but you find yourself wanting to fight it. You don't want to live that way any longer, because you have a new identity now. You're united to Christ and you fight against sin.

I found this quote by John Murray very helpful:

There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin... [sin that survives and still indwells us, versus sin that reigns and rules over us]. There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate [those who are born again], in conflict with sin and the unregenerate [those who are not alive in Christ], complacent with sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us; it is another for us to live in sin.

Paul is saying that even though every one of us still sins, we have a new identity now and sin no longer rules our lives. So ask yourself honestly: can I continue in sin deliberately without distaste, without wanting to fight against it? Can I comfortably tolerate sin in my life, or do I recognize this battle taking place? The existence of this battle is evidence of your new identity.

It's evidence of the fact that you now belong to Christ. Even though sin lives in you still, you no longer live under the dominion of sin.

Notice one more thing about this identity in verse 11. We focused a lot on the first part—dead to sin—but it's not just dead to sin, is it? We are alive to God in Christ Jesus. I love that. Where is Jesus right now? Jesus is living in the presence of His Father, delighting in Him, fellowshiping with Him. Jesus loves His Father and the Father loves His Son. What did Jesus pray before He went to the cross to die for us? He said, "Father, oh that the love with which You have loved Me before the foundation of the world may be in them, that they may experience this communion, this fellowship, that We have had from all eternity. Oh, that My people would experience that same life, that same fellowship" (John 17).

Paul says we need to consider ourselves now dead to sin *and* alive to God in Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus lives in the presence of the Father, ever delighting to do His will, so we now live in God's presence and have a living relationship with the Father. Christ welcomes us into the relationship He has with His Father. Because we are in Christ, He says, "Come and enjoy all that I enjoy with My Father." I think it's very important that we not just think about the death, but that we also think about the life that we now have with Christ before the Father.

Remember in the Old Testament when God would send His people into battle, He would often give them a promise before they went out. He did this with Joshua, in Joshua 1. What promise—what four words—did God often speak to His people before He sent them out into battle? He would say, "*I am with you.*" "*Fear not, I am with you.*" "I'm with you, Joshua." Or Isaiah 43:2, "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.*"

What did Jesus say when He gave us the Great Commission? He said, "*Behold, I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20). When we battle sin, the Father to Whom we are now alive in Christ Jesus speaks the same words to us: "I am with you." He wants us to take that to heart, knowing we are always with Him, always in His presence. Pause and think about that for a minute. Of all the strategies I could give you to fight sin, none is more powerful than that. Can you imagine committing any sin if you truly believed, "He is with me"? I'm alive to God right now. He's with me. He sees me. He knows me. He's intimately acquainted with all my ways. He animates my life. He energizes me. He protects and empowers me. He will never leave me. He provides for me. What if that truth captured us more?

David Powlison, in a great article about fighting sin, says this:

"I AM WITH YOU" means you're always out in public, in the face of God....Sin can't stand to be out in public where everyone knows and

everybody's watching. "I am with you" means that the Person who can help you right now knows and is watching. In fact, He is watching over you to protect you. He will help you escape darkness, because He has transferred you into the Kingdom of the Son Whom He loves."

So think about that as you're fighting sin: God the Father is with you in Christ, empowering you by His Spirit. You are not alone in this battle. "I, the Lord your God am with you wherever you go, to empower and protect and provide for you, to energize and animate and comfort you." If we believe this truth—if we realize, "I'm alive to God in Christ Jesus right now. He is with me right now"—that would wither the power sin still has over our lives. We'd realize that sin is nothing. It's a cruel master and is not going to provide for us or protect us or help us escape darkness. It's going to suck us in deeper. But He is with us. That's the identity we need to embrace; the way we need to believe and think.

2. A tyranny we need to resist (verses 12-13a)

Paul also says there's something we must not do. In verses 12-13a we see what I believe is the first moral exhortation in the book of Romans. Isn't that interesting? All this wonderful doctrinal truth—and now we have the first commandment in the book: "*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.*" This is the "don't" of this section—a tyranny we need to resist.

This tyranny is twofold. Don't let sin reign in your mortal body. Very simple. Very clear. You're set free. Sin doesn't dominate your life anymore. It's not your lord. It's not your dictator. It's not your ruler. You're like someone who has been released from a bad gang. Don't let that gangster lord take over your life anymore. You've been set free from prison. The sentence has been paid. Don't let the prison warden take you back in; you've been set free. Don't let sin reign.

So call sin's bluff. When sin threatens or cajoles you, telling you, "You've got to obey me. I'm going to satisfy you. You're not going to be happy or secure without me. You need me"—you say to sin, "Oh, no, I don't. I've been set free from your cruel dominion. You've done nothing but bring misery into my life. You never satisfy for long. I'm free now. I'm not going to let you reign over me any longer." You have to have this imaginary conversation in your mind with sin and resist its tyranny. "I am no longer under your command, sin. My loyalty belongs to a new Commander-in-Chief." This is something we have to do all the time. It's ongoing.

Christopher Ash puts it very clearly: “We cannot say, ‘I will never sin again.’ But we can say, ‘I need not sin now.’” At this very moment, I am free not to sin. What happens if we sin? If moment by moment, day by day, hour by hour, that becomes the way we think, then we will be free to say, “No,” to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, to not let sin take these bodies hostage and make us obey its passions and desires.

The second thing Paul says we must make sure we don't do is: “*Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness*” (verse 13). Don't offer any part of your body to this cruel gangster lord. Don't give yourself over to sin's dominion. Ray Ortlund paraphrases it like this: “Don't make yourself available to sin as tools of wickedness.” As we see these simple commands, a couple questions arise: Have you grown apathetic or complacent to any area of sin in your life? Is there any area of your mind, affections, body or behavior that you are giving over, making available, to sin as a tool of wickedness?

I read a little story of a great eagle that was tethered to a post. It walked around and around and around that post. One day a new owner announced, “I'm going to release the bird.” So a crowd gathered and the rope was removed. But the eagle continued walking around and around and around in the same old rut. He was free, but he did not fly. The person telling the story said that the sad absurdity of this scene is like the Christian who continues giving himself over to the power of sin. Paul is saying, “You've been freed now. Don't give yourself over to sin's domination.”

So there's self-denial and vigilant resistance. There's saying “No” to sin's tyranny, a resolute determination to deny sin's advances. But the new life of a Christian is not merely “Don't.” It's also “Do.” It's not just saying “No.” It's also saying “Yes.” It's not just not giving yourself over to sin; it's actively giving yourself over to God.

3. An army in which we need to enlist (verse 13b)

The second part of verse 13 brings us to the “Do” of the passage. This is like a military metaphor. Think of this as an army in which we need to enlist. “*Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*” Again, Ortlund paraphrases it like this: “Offer yourselves wholly to God as ones newly alive as weapons of righteousness for God.” So think of soldiers who have been called into a victorious campaign, one they know will result in life and liberty for millions, under a Commander-in-Chief Who is full of majesty, full of grace, full of truth, full of honor. One Whose service is perfect freedom. One Who rules with such grace and dignity that it's an honor to serve in His forces.

Picture these soldiers coming—with all their weapons, strength and vigor—saying, “Oh, Commander, we are Yours. Take all that we are. Take all that we have, and use it for Your victorious campaign. We give ourselves wholly over to You. We enlist in Your army and we will fight against everything that opposes Your gracious rule in our lives and in this world. We will look for You to lead us into full victory. Oh, what a privilege it is to serve You. Thank You that You’ve set us free from that ruthless dictator over there. Thank You that You called us now into Your service. Take my life, Lord—all that I am, all that I have. Let it be consecrated, given over to You for Your service.”

This is a decisive commitment, this presenting yourself to God. Even the verb tense here is different than what Paul used earlier in the verse when he said, “Don’t present your members to sin and don’t let sin reign.” Here it’s a once-for-all giving of yourself. This doesn’t really mean that you only do it once, but it means you are resolute and decisive in giving yourself to God. There’s no turning back. There’s no holding back. There’s no reservation here. You are offering yourself to God as one who’s been brought from death to life, and you give every part of yourself to Him as an instrument for righteousness. This gets very specific.

I was reading a little Bible study by Tim Keller, in which he said, “Think of a way you are wrestling against sin. What would it look like to offer that part of your body, that part of your character, to God as an instrument for righteousness?” Think about your hands. Hands can be used for wickedness; hands can be used for righteousness. What about saying to God each morning, “My hands are Yours”? Your feet? Your feet can take you into paths of sin; your feet can take you into paths of service to God and His righteousness. Your voice? “Take my voice and let me sing every, only for my King.” Your lips? Isn’t this where sin so often gets a stronghold in our lives—through our lips? Didn’t James say if anyone can contain the tongue, he’s a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check? Isn’t that the area where we stumble so often? What if we awake each morning and say, “God, take my lips. Take my tongue. I give them over to You. I offer myself to You for Your service as an instrument of righteousness.”

My intellect? Some of us feel very dim-witted. We feel like, “Oh, I don’t have much there.” Others of you might think, “I’m pretty smart.” Whatever you have, it’s from God. It’s for God. What if you took whatever intellectual capacity you have—whether you feel it’s meager or strong—and say, “God, I don’t want this to be for me. I don’t want this to be puffing me up. I want to use the intellectual ability You’ve given me to serve You.”

On and on it goes. My money. My will. My heart. Go back to that particular sin struggle. I can think of what it is for me right now—what I wrote down. It’s not just one thing, but

something specific. What could you give to God to be used for His service in that particular struggle with sin? It's what God's calling us to do here.

4. A victory we need to anticipate (verse 14)

Finally, God gives us encouragement in verse 14: a victory we need to anticipate. He emboldens, encourages and comforts us with the knowledge that this battle against sin is not a futile fight. It's not going to result in defeat. This is a victorious campaign. You don't need to be frustrated, fearful, discouraged or defeated about this. You can have confidence because "*sin will have no dominion over you.*" Sin will not have mastery over you. Ortlund says, "The sin within you is doomed." It's not your destiny to live forever under its power. Another commentator says, "You will no longer be helpless under sin's power." There's a promise here: sin shall not be your master. Sin cannot control your life.

And Paul's reason is beautiful: "*Since you are not under...*" We would expect him to say "sin" here again, because that's what he's been talking about throughout this passage. You'd expect him to say, "Sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under sin." But instead he says, "*You are not under law but under grace.*" Paul is showing how brilliantly insightful he is into the workings of the human heart—the motives of the human heart—when he brings us back to this truth that we are not under law here.

This is where sin gets so much of its power. We sin because we are trying to find our identity, our sense of worth, in something besides God. When we are on this roller coaster—thinking we're approved because of our own performance, or thinking we are disapproved because of our failures—then we're never free. We're living in fear. When we're seeking to prove ourselves before God, or think that our identity or worth depends on something we do or something we are, it's so discouraging and crippling, and it saps the power to live a holy life.

Instead, we should realize, "I'm no longer under law. My identity—my sense of worth—is no longer based on my performance. I'm righteous in God's eyes by grace because of what Jesus has done. It's not in me. It's only in You, and You love me freely and accept me fully because of what Jesus has done. I'm free, God. I am accepted. The guilt of my sin is covered by the righteousness of Christ. I'm free from bondage to sin because of the power of Jesus in my life. I'm not alone. I have the Spirit of the Messiah living in me."

When we walk in that freedom—when we rest and rejoice, knowing, "I am under grace; God's grace is reigning and ruling my life"—then sin's desires are undermined and it saps sin's power over our lives. Paul says, "Rest and rejoice in the grace of God that reigns over your life,

that rules and covers you. You are under grace.” And that’s where we find the freedom to fight the good fight of faith against sin.

I love this little poem by John Bunyan. It’s one worth memorizing.

Run, John, run! The law commands—
But gives us neither feet nor hands.
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings!

There is power in the gospel to resist the impulses and urges of sin. There is power in the gospel to walk in freedom. It’s great news. We are free in Christ. When you’re falling under the sway of sin, realize that your first and greatest need is not to try harder, not to “just say no.” Your first and greatest need is to reflect more deeply on the gospel, to rejoice more deeply in what Jesus has done for you. When you realize that you are free to fight sin with confidence.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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