

Be Killing Sin or Sin Will be Killing You Romans 6:12-14

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Steve DeWitt

The picture below was taken Wednesday.



No, I was not on an archaeological dig. That is one hole in the Commons. That's a big hole. What do you see down there? There is steel column anchored onto a very large foundation. It's the foundation of our building.

This is a kind of picture of what we are doing with Romans. Preaching Romans is like unveiling how massive the foundation of our salvation is. It sits upon the firm bedrock of God's character and promises. It is as dense and heavy as Christ's righteousness imputed to us through justification. It can carry the weight of all our sin and hold us up strong in the battering winds of life. Our salvation is held secure because it is grounded in the promises of God and he never wavers. We should be glad our church's real foundation is Jesus Christ.

On we go in Romans 6. In verses 5-11 we saw how God's grace changes our relationship to sin and to God. The unbeliever is alive to sin and dead to God. But a Christian is dead to sin and alive to God. What a difference that makes! The unbeliever can only act according to his sin nature, but a Christian has a new nature. A new heart. A new set of affections and purposes that align with God's will. Christians still struggle daily with sin, but sin no longer has to win. Sin no longer is the Darth Lord of our lives.

Then we saw in v. 11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11 ESV) The Apostle Paul begins by stating the fact that when Jesus died *for* our sins, we died *to* our sins. Our identity is changed. Our posture toward sin is no longer bowing. Now it's war. Paul wants us to live out our new identity as alive to God and dead to sin. But how do we do that?

"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, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14)

For five chapters, Paul has focused on teaching: teaching about the wrath of God. The law of God. The grace of God. Justification by God through faith. There has been very little exhortation. Very little, *now this is what we must do.*

But this passage is filled with imperatives as Paul pleads with the Romans to live out their new life in Christ in the practicalities of everyday life. Our obedience. Our dying to sin. Our response of love and service to God.

My summary of what Paul says here and through chapter 7 is a famous quote by probably the greatest theologian on sin and temptation. His name was John Owen (see below).



He's a fascinating guy. He lived through the turmoil in England in the 1600s. He was a friend of Oliver Cromwell. He was a theologian and thinker par excellent. His writings on sin and temptation are classics and read to this day. He was a marvelous gift to the church. One phrase that he had is a kind of mantra phrase among the current reformed hipster crowd. You can buy coffee mugs and T-shirts with this phrase on it, "**Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.**" (John Owen)

You might be confused. *Wait, you said when Jesus died for my sin I died to my sin. Yes. If I died to sin, why do I have to kill sin? You say my whole relationship to sin has changed.*

Through union with Christ, Christ defeated sin. Justification removes the eternal penalty of my sin. Right? So, I ask again, if I died to sin, why do I have to now kill sin?

We Died to Sin, Sin Didn't Die to Us

Christ's victory over sin on our behalf releases us from sin's ultimate claim over us. Ultimate mastery. But we need to realize that sin is an active and alive force in the world that remains in our lives and nature. This is called *indwelling sin*. Just because we died to sin doesn't mean sin died to us.¹ Sin is still in me. Sin hasn't given up. Sin is still at war. The reason that Paul turns now from education to exhortation, is that he understood the Christians' war with sin was not over.

America's wars provide examples of our war with sin. After World War II, for many years they found Japanese soldiers on remote islands who hadn't heard the war was over. They were still ready to shoot and kill. They were still lethal threats. The victory was won, but they were still at war.

A better example is the Iraq war. Long after victory was declared, a guerilla-type warfare was continued and people in our own church were shot at and bombed after victory was declared.

Sin is like that. Sin is the defeated Japanese soldier still ready to kill. Sin is the Taliban or ISIS fighter continuing to destroy. We must understand as Christians that we died to sin, but sin didn't die to us. Sin is still at war. This explains Paul's exhortations here. *"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."* (Romans 6:12-13)

"Therefore." Because you are dead to sin and alive to God positionally, make it your priority NOT to let sin take over your life again. Notice he says, *"mortal body"* in verse 12. Our *"members"* in verse 13. While this certainly includes more than our physical bodies, the emphasis is on our bodies. Why? Because our bodies are the context within which we live our lives. The framework. The space. Any sin we ever commit, we always commit it in the context of our physical existence. Our enemy knows this. Further, our enemy knows our weaknesses and these weaknesses often relate to legit needs our bodies have. Sin seeks entry points in the weak spots in our defensive line. For most of us, those weak spots are not intellectual or philosophical, but physical. Like what? Here are a few ways.

Sin turns a need into an obsession

We all have needs. We need food, water, health, shelter, relationships, etc. All of these are by God's design. We have natural desires for these things. Sin sees each of these as a weakness to be exploited. Jesus' first temptation involved food. Satan tempted Jesus after 40 days without food or water. What did he tempt him with? A need. After 40 days in a desert, I'd call food a legitimate need. But Jesus would have had to meet the need outside of God's will. Our enemy knows well how easy it is to turn a legitimate God-given need into a sinful desire. Are you currently operating with some need turned into an obsession? A dependency? *Don't let sin reign through your bodily needs.*

¹ See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The New Man* p. 153

Sin corrupts a good bodily pleasure

If Satan can't get us with our needs, then he aims at our pleasures. What better way to sneak in than under the guise of a good pleasure? The easy example of this is sexual desire. Sex is a gift from God. Human form and shape and sexual pleasure are all God's doing. But think of all the sin that is somehow connected to male/female sexual desire. Porn is a sexual desire gone wrong. Sex outside of marriage is sexual desire gone wrong. Masturbation and other forms of self-sex are sexual desire gone wrong. Obviously, sexual violence is sexual desire weaponized in terribly destructive ways. Sex between a husband and wife over a lifetime is a wonderful gift from God. But the enemy sees the good gift as a weakness to exploit and corrupt. *Don't let sin reign in your bodily pleasures.*

Sin tempts us at our moments of greatest bodily strength and weakness

Satan's been doing this a long time. He knows how our bodies and minds work. When we are in a season of strength, he knows this is an opportunity. Why? When I'm strong I don't feel my need for God. When life is good, I don't live in dependence on God. When everything's good, do you pray more or less? David was at his height of power when he strolled onto the porch and saw Bathsheba. With his feet freshly washed by Jesus, Peter pledged that he never would deny Jesus. *"Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Sin also uses our seasons of weakness. When we are in pain. Discouraged. Depressed. When the things of God seem distant or irrelevant, now sin has an opportunity. Satan waited until Jesus' maximum bodily weakness to come both in the desert and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What is sin seeking? It wants to sit once again on the throne of our lives. It wants to be restored to lord and master. Peter compares Satan's tactics to a lion who seeks to destroy us. How do lions kill? They wait. They hide. They lurk. They camouflage. They pounce. I'm convinced that the vast majority of Christians have little if any daily concern with an enemy seeking to destroy us. An enemy so close as to be actually within us.

How do we act when we perceive a danger? This week I was driving out of our neighborhood and noticed a strange-looking fellow walking in our neighborhood at a strange time of day. I contacted Jennifer and the DeWitt house went to Defcon 1. Why? There is a potential threat.

Don't think salvation by grace means there is no threat. Don't think dying to sin with Christ means there is no threat. Don't think union with Christ means there is no threat. Why? *We died to sin, but sin has never died to us.* There is an enemy who lurks, especially around bodily passions. Don't let your body's desires be the space that the enemy exploits. Don't utilize your body for unrighteousness. Well then, what are we to do?

Death to Sin Must Precede Killing Sin

"But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." (Romans 6:13)

Where does Paul go? He goes back to everything he has been saying about justification by faith. Right back to our union and identity with Christ. Don't present or use your body as an instrument for sin. You have been brought from death to life with Christ. Live like that.

How? Present yourselves to God and present your "members" (code for body) to God as a tool for righteousness.

If this sounds familiar, it should. In six more chapters we have him saying almost the same thing. Famous verses, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" (Romans 12:1) Chapter 6, present your body. Chapter 12 adds, "*as a living sacrifice.*" An offering. A tool in the hand of our master. There is a don't and there is a do. Do offer yourselves to God.

I want you to see that Paul doesn't say what moralists and legalists say is the moral solution. *Just say no! Don't do it!* Legalism creates rules and fences and corn mazes of reasons why they are good ideas to fight against sin. The problem is that saying no to sin by itself doesn't work. It may work for a day or a week or a year. But the pig always finds the moral mud. Legalists try to solve this with add-on rules. Moralists try guilt. These only make further Pharisees out of us.

So, for example if you grew up like me, sex was a rather taboo subject. All my friends were told the same thing. *Don't do it!* Guess what that does? It only adds to the intrigue and desire. I had one counselor tell me how so much of his counseling is men who grew up in strict fundamentalist-type circles who were off the rails about sex. They end up in a far worse place than if nothing had been said at all. Why? Because we can't handle sin when the only solution is *don't do it.*

The moralist and the legalist teach it this way, *kill sin and then you will eventually die to it.* Get pure. Be moral. Pull yourselves up by your own efforts. Do right and then you will live life free from sin and maybe be saved. That's not the gospel and that's not Christianity.

That's earning your salvation, and equally bad, it's placing the burden of victory over sin purely on willpower. Sinners can't gain victory over sin by killing sin and then dying to it. Why? Sin is a king. Sin seeks the throne of our hearts. The only way we can gain victory over sin is to die to sin, which we also can't do by ourselves. But Jesus did, and because I'm in union with him, I died to sin with him. Therefore, as a Christian, sin is no longer my necessary master. I'm no longer trying to earn my salvation by cleaning myself up from sin. To kill sin we must die to it. To die to sin we must be in union with Christ. We are united to Christ by faith in Christ as Savior.

I died to sin and now from a position of sin's hold on me being broken, I can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, encouragement of God's people, godly examples in my life, and increased desire for God's will in my life, kill sin's domination of my life.

"There must be a constant and increasing appreciation that though sin still remains it does not have the mastery. There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us: it is another for us to live in sin." -John Murray²

This is why the man who comes to church or Celebrate Recovery or AA thinks, *I'm tired of this destructive sin; I want to make some changes,* will never do so in a lasting manner and certainly not in a sanctifying manner until he has died to sin first. He may think he has because he feels guilt or like he's at the end of his rope. But sin's power remains. You have

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 154.

to die to sin first to kill sin second. How do we die to sin? By repentance and faith in Jesus Christ which unites us to his victory over sin.

A simple illustration is the Cubs W flag (see below).



When the Cubs win, you fly the W. Declare the victory. Identify with the win. Talk to Cubs fans and they will say, *we won!* Did that fan win anything? No. They watched the game while consuming unhealthy snacks. They couldn't throw the ball from the pitcher's mound to the catcher. Most couldn't run to first base. They did nothing. What are they doing? Identifying with the victory of another.

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14) The Christian is to live every day under the flag of grace. How? By refusing to allow sin to dominate any aspect of my life. *But how do I do that?* By presenting my body as a kind of offering to God. It's not just NOT letting sin reign. It is actively allowing God to reign in my life. How?

By stoking godly desires and offering all that I am to God. Like a living sacrifice. Please see this as I think this is a huge missing piece in so many Christian's lives. Don't let sin dominate your lives, rather let God dominate. Give yourself fully to God! Pray it: *Today, I'm all yours. I'm all in. I'm living under grace. God, dominate me today.*

Yes, this is complicated, and I don't understand it all myself. But I know the starting point. Identify with Jesus in his death to sin. Identify with Jesus in his new life. My beginning point is not my moral efforts or strength of will (self-salvation). My starting point is the cross and Christ. And now I offer everything right down to my toe nails as an offering to God to use all of me for his holy purposes. By doing this, I kill sin before sin kills me. I fight against sin in light of the already victory over sin accomplished at Calvary.

Christian, is this where you are? Let Romans take your heart and life there. Cry out to God urging his domination of everything in your life. Yield all you are to him. As the hymnwriter wrote:

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.
Swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.
It shall be Thy royal throne.*

*Take my love: my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.
Ever, only, all for Thee.³*

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³ Frances Ridley Havergal, "Take My Life and Let it Be," 1874.