

## You Gotta Serve Somebody Romans 6:11-14

Gratefully adapted from "Romans – A Gospel Shaped Life-*Don't Let Sin Preside*"  
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About this time last year (2016) four-year-old Isaiah Dickerson climbed under a fence and fell 12 feet down into the gorilla enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo. Fearing for the life of the boy, zoo officials had to shoot Harambe, the 17-year-old gorilla, sparking a public outrage among those people who just do not realize how dangerous a wild gorilla can be.

Sin is a lot like a wild animal in a zoo. Although those animals are dangerous and can do us much harm, as long as they stay in their cages and we stay behind the barriers that have been put up for our safety, those animals can roar and growl all they want, but they can't harm us. It is only when we go around or under or over those barriers and get into the cage that we are in danger.

For us as Christians, controlling sin in our lives is a lot like the caging of wild animals. As we learned last week, because we are united with and growing together with Jesus through His and our death and resurrection, we have been freed from the power of sin. We have been safely removed from its cage. So now **sin can no longer harm us or dominate our lives unless we choose to intentionally ignore and go around the protective barriers that have been placed between us and sin.**

But even though Jesus has given us the ability to live a life that is not subject to the power of sin, that doesn't mean that living that life is an easy thing to do. So in Romans six, Paul gives us some very practical guidance about how we can now "live in newness of life" because we live "in Jesus".

Remember that last week, in the first 10 verses of chapter six Paul used the key words "**don't you know** and **we know,**" to remind us of the symbiotic relationship we now share with Jesus: **when he died to sin and rose from the dead to a new life, freed from sin's penalty and power, because we are united with Him, we too, died to sin and rose to a new life.** But the focus last week was primarily on our minds. Therefore one of our applications was to stress the importance of coming back frequently to meditate on this section of the Bible so that we'll keep this liberating truth at the front of our **minds**.

So you also must  
consider yourselves dead to sin  
and alive to God in Christ Jesus.  
Romans 6:11

This week, let's pick up this theme again to see how, **along with our minds,** Paul now calls for us to also engage our **hearts** and our **wills** in living out this truth we know: **that we are dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.**

So, in verse 11, Paul shifts from our just **knowing** this truth intellectually, to how we must now also change our attitudes (our hearts) towards sin. Like Jesus Christ, we must now **Consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God**. This means we need to take a serious look at where we now are—as Christians—and own the fact that we are no longer the same people we were as non-Christians.

And then Paul gives us an actual command, with an imbedded **warning**.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.  
Romans 6:12

Remember that Paul is writing here to believers. So when **he commands us not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies, the implication is that it is possible for that still to happen even in the life of a Christian**. That is because when we put our faith in Jesus, our old sin nature is not removed; it has just lost its power over us. We have been freed from slavery to it. So the ability to sin still resides within the life of a disciple of Jesus and if it is left uncaged, it is possible for that sin to once again seduce us into following our earthly passions.

Notice that verse 12 is not merely a suggestion, it is a command from God—through Paul. Thus, there are two things we need to understand about this command:

- First, **it is possible for us to obey this command**. God never gives us a command in the Bible where He does not also provide us with whatever is needed for us to be able to obey that command. In this case, it is possible for us to obey this command because we have been freed from our slavery to sin as a result of being united with Jesus in His death and resurrection to a new life.
- The second thing we must note is that this freedom is not a given, **we still have a responsibility to actively work to stop the reign of sin in our lives**. Paul does not merely teach “Let go and let God,” but rather he calls us here to **move from merely knowing these truths to changing our attitude about the power of sin in our lives, and by an act of our wills, choosing to obey Jesus rather than our earthly passions**.

***Stop letting sin reign in your mortal body,***  
to make you obey its passions.  
Romans 6:12

We could literally translate Paul's command as: "***Stop letting sin reign in your mortal body...***" Paul was apparently aware that there would be Christians who will allow sin to continue reigning in their lives and they need to quit living like that immediately. And so three times he instructs us ....

**Consider yourself dead to sin**

**do not let sin** exercise dominion  
in your mortal bodies ...

For **sin will have no dominion** over you,  
since you are not under law but under grace  
Romans 6: 11, 12, 14

But even though Paul begins his command with a warning, he ends it with **a word of encouragement**, making it clear that **the reason that we can carry out the command in verse 12 and take the actions he calls for in verse 13 is because we are no longer under law but under grace (verse 14)**. The operation of God's grace and His indwelling Holy Spirit insure that sin can no longer have dominion in our lives. We have been changed; we are now able to cage this beast.

This is what separates Christians from non-Christians. Unbelievers can become more outwardly moral, at least in the short-run, by self-effort. But **that is merely like putting a tuxedo on a pig**. They might look nice for a while, but as soon as they see a mud puddle the temptation is going to be too great. That is because nothing has changed the pig's nature. The good news for us is that **our union with Jesus does change us from the inside out and this change now gives us the ability to keep sin from having dominion over us**.

But what does this liberating union and new life with Christ actually look like for me?  
How can I now keep sin from reigning in my mortal body?

Fortunately, Paul answers those questions for us in verse 13 where we find two more commands—one negative and one positive:

No longer present your members to sin as  
instruments of wickedness,

but present yourselves to God as those who  
have been brought from death to life, ...  
Romans 6:13

These two commands give me three important applications to work on in my life.

**1. Don't make excuses for sin**

Although we probably don't think of it in these terms, even we Christians have a tendency to make excuses for our sin. Let's see if any of these sound familiar at all:

- I know I have a temper, but I can't help it because I'm Irish. My whole family has this problem and there is nothing I can do about it.
- I know I have a problem with lust, but that is just because I am young and live in this pornographic culture or it's "*because that's the way God made me.*"
- I know that I'm not the kind of employee that I should be, but it is because the people I work with make it impossible for me to be that kind of worker.
- I know that I don't love others the way I should but having been hurt in the past, as they say "*once burned twice cautious.*"

In reply, the apostle John warns us...

If we say we have no sin,  
we deceive ourselves,  
and the truth is not in us.  
But, if we confess our sins,  
he who is faithful and just  
will forgive (1 John 1:8 ESV)

**So the difference between keeping sin powerless or once again letting it reign, is whether or not we confess our sins or excuse them.** When we make excuses for our sin, what we're really doing is letting our old sinful nature—which God has declared no longer has power over us--nevertheless continue living uncaged in our lives.

In essence **we're trying to make our old life suitable for the new us.** But that can never work because, as we learned last week, when we put our faith in Jesus, he transforms us into completely new creations—ones which are no longer subject to the power and dominion of sin.

- 1. Don't make excuses for sin**  
**2. Refuse to let sin get a foothold**

So, Paul begins with this negative command. *"No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness"*

The verb "**present**" here is a compound word that means "**to place at one's disposal**" or "**to present oneself for service.**" And the form of the command conveys the idea of "**stop doing this!**" So it might be helpful to translate this command like this:

*Stop putting your members  
at the disposal of your sinful nature  
as weapons of unrighteousness.  
(Romans 6:13 paraphrased)*

In other words, the position I must take in my mind is that **I can have nothing more to do with sinning because God hates sin and I am now a new creation, committed to the purpose of "living for" (pleasing and glorifying) God.**

This is similar to the commitment I made when I married Betty. When I spoke my wedding vows and became one with her, one of the aspects of that union was that I gave up once and for all, even the possibility of being unfaithful to her with another woman--emotionally or physically. And I have worked successfully at remaining faithful to that commitment over the years.

Similarly, because we have been given a new life in union with Christ and no longer enslaved to sin, we must make a commitment to never again let sin gain control. There are a lot of ways that I can apply this command in my life, but here are two that are crucial.

1. **I need to guard against the idea that some sins are greater than others, so it's somehow OK to commit those "small sins".** That would be like in my marriage saying that it's OK to fantasize about being with another woman as long as I don't actually follow through and do that physically. I am very sure that that Jesus had something to say about excusing our internal sins in his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus hates all sin, no matter how small we might think it to be and since we are united with Him, we ought to have the same mindset.
2. The important thing I must do is to **get the sin out of my life immediately as soon as I become aware of it.** Sin is like kudzu. If you see one vine sprouting in the ground and you act quickly, with little difficulty you can poison it or pull it up to keep it from spreading. But if you let kudzu go, even for just a few days, before you know it the vines will be climbing over your treetops. And then eliminating it will become a lifelong struggle.

*I know a southern lady who actually found one good use for kudzu. She makes beautiful baskets from the dried vines. But she also warns her customers to never water the basket.*

Like kudzu, when I allow sin to remain in my life and let it get a foothold, the longer it lingers, the harder it is to remove. You know this is true.

So as soon as I become aware of a sin, I need to repent--to change my thinking regarding this sin--and confess it to God, which includes taking appropriate action to prevent myself from returning to that sin and allowing it once again to reign in my life.

But I'm glad that Paul doesn't just tell us what not to do. He also gives us a positive command that exhorts us to...

1. Don't make excuses for sin
2. Refuse to let sin get a foothold
3. Serve God

but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and **present your members to God as instruments of righteousness**  
Romans 6:13

This idea then becomes Paul's conclusion to the first 11 chapters of his letter. At the beginning of chapter 12 he writes:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, 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

The idea in both of these verses is that the antidote to presenting our members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness is **to present those same members instead to God as instruments of righteousness**. In other words, **I need to commit my entire person--body, soul, and spirit--to serving God**. In fact, the word translated

“**worship**” in Romans 12:1 is also appropriately translated “**spiritual service of worship**” in other translations, because **your service to God is worship** .

So that is how you no longer “*let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies.*” It’s never enough to just try and remove something bad from our lives. If we don’t replace the bad with something good, the bad has a way of returning to its former place. As important as it is to be relentless in getting sin out of our lives immediately so it doesn’t gain a foothold, it is equally important to put something else good in its place so that sin cannot easily return.

And the way that I do that is to present myself to God as a willing volunteer for His army. **Every day I report to duty and make my life available to serve Him in every area of my life**—my personal life, my family life, my job, my church and in my community. And while my primary motivation for serving God needs to be because **I want to please and glorify the one who purchased me with His blood**, one of the additional benefits of living like that is that I gain victory over sin in my life.

The truth of the matter is that when I get busy serving God, I just don’t have a place in my life for sin. The more time I spend in God’s service, the less time and energy I have left to sin. So sin tends to become less and less of a draw for me.

In his book “*Listening to the Voice of God*”, Pastor Roger Barrier shared that God once led him to preach a one sentence sermon. And some of you are probably praying for God to lead me to do that as well...someday. But that one sentence sermon really summarizes well what we’ve learned this morning:

***It is not possible  
to be content with your sins  
and really be a Christian.***

**There is no such thing as a Christian who lives continually under the lordship of sin, since by definition, a genuine disciple of Jesus lives under the Lordship of Jesus.**

That does not mean that genuine Christians do not occasionally fall into sin, sometimes even gross sins. But if they are genuine disciples of Jesus they just can’t remain there because they will be miserable until they get right with God again.

As wise proverb declares:

***Unconverted sinners  
leap into sin and love it;***

***Converted sinners  
lapse into sin and loathe it.***

So if you are not experiencing consistent victory over sin in your life, there are really only two possibilities.

1. **If the fact that you are living under the dominion of sin doesn't bother you, then there is a real possibility that you are not a genuine disciple of Jesus in the first place.** And if that is the case then I can assure you that you will never get victory over your sin until you first make a genuine commitment of your life to Jesus by allowing Him to be the Lord of your life.
2. On the other hand, if the idea that you can't get control over your sin really bothers you, then more likely as a new creation in Christ, **you haven't done your part by taking to heart and living out this command to present yourself to God as an instrument of righteous.** You haven't adequately considered the fact that you are dead to sin as a result of being united with Jesus and you haven't consistently reinforced that truth by engaging your will and choosing to present your life to God for righteous purposes rather than presenting it to sin for unrighteous purposes.

Wouldn't you love to live a life that has been freed from slavery to sin? The good news is that God wants that for your life even more than you want it. And not only that, by uniting you with Christ, He has made that a real possibility for you. Now you just need to do your part.

Let's pray about this.