

Do Not Let the Sin Nature Reign

📖 Romans 6:12-14

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Romans 6:1-8:17 is the pre-eminent section of the NT on the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification comes from the Greek root *αγιαζ* and is variously translated as “saint, holy, sanctify and sanctification.” The word refers to “an object that is set apart for a specific purpose.” In the doctrine of sanctification we are the objects that are set apart by God for a specific purpose. The setting apart comes in three stages of phases; phase one is positional sanctification. In this phase all who have believed in Jesus Christ *have been* set apart by God for a specific purpose. This is solely a work of God that occurs once-for-all, setting apart the believer so that he enjoys a secure position before God. As such all believers are called “saints.” Even the carnal Corinthian’s are said in 1 Cor 1:2 to be “saints” and to “have been sanctified.” So this is phase one of sanctification, positional sanctification, and all believers have it regardless of their words, thoughts or deeds. Phase two is experiential sanctification. In this phase the believer *is being* set apart by God for the purpose of glorifying God. This is a gradual process that is a cooperative effort. God the Spirit is working toward our sanctification but we have a responsibility to be sanctified. As such we are commanded to be sanctified. This is phase two of sanctification, experiential sanctification, and all believers are somewhere in the process. Phase three is ultimate sanctification. In this phase the believer *will be* set apart by God for the purpose of dwelling with God forever in the resurrection. The giving of a resurrection body is solely a work of God that occurs once-for-all. It is at that point that we are sanctified entirely. So we have positional, experiential and ultimate sanctification.

Which phase is Paul addressing in Romans 6, 7 and 8? Phase two, experiential sanctification. This is the phase when the believer *is being* set apart by God for the purpose of glorifying Him in their lives. This is a gradual process that is a cooperative in nature. God the Spirit is working toward our sanctification but we have a responsibility to be sanctified. This means that sanctification is not an automatic process. Otherwise Paul would have no need to address it in Romans 6. Nor would Paul present his own struggles with sanctification in Romans 7. And finally Paul would not provide the solution to the struggle in Romans 8. So it is apparent that it is absolutely necessary for believers to learn how to be sanctified. It is the lack of sound training in this area that is, in my estimation, the chief reason believers fail to progress in the Christian life.

Today I want to clarify some key ideas in Romans 6:1-11. I mentioned before that I was not totally satisfied with my understanding of some of the ideas in these verses and I needed more time to study and think through them. Since last Sunday I have accomplished this. In the process I confirmed the essential facts of our verse-by-verse exegesis but am now more knowledgeable in the concepts such as “the sin nature” and “the old man.” So today I want to elaborate on these ideas in a brief review and then press on into Romans 6:12ff.

We need to understand that in Romans 6:1-7:13 Paul uses the articular form of “sin” twenty five times to refer to “the sin nature” and not an act of sin. Only once, in 6:15 does Paul refer to an act of personal sin. Paul’s major topic is the believer’s relationship to “the sin nature” and how to live the Christian life relative to the fact that we still have “a sin nature.”

Now what do we mean by “sin nature?” We mean “a sinful disposition, an inclination, a tendency that influences a person’s conduct and character toward sin.” Originally when God created man and placed him in the garden he did not have a sinful disposition but a holy disposition. One of the great mysteries of the Scripture is why Adam chose contrary to his holy disposition. In other words, if he was inclined toward holiness, that was his natural disposition, then why did he choose contrary to that disposition? We are not told anything other than the fact that he did. We too participated in Adam as a race and so as the human race comes into existence through procreation each little infant is conceived in sin such that they have a sinful disposition. This is why there is death in the womb; that is why after we are born we grow up knowing how to sin. It is natural for us to commit personal acts of sin because we have a sinful disposition toward God and the things of God. So then we learn that our acts of personal sin are sourced in the sinful disposition that we are all conceived with. In fact we are a slave to the sinful disposition and forced to comply with it as we will see from the master-slave analogy Paul uses later in Romans 6.

But something significant happens when we become a believer in Jesus Christ. That is what Paul is addressing in Romans 6:1ff. In verse 1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in the sinful disposition so that grace may increase?” The thought that we are to continue as we once were as unbelievers, as slaves to the sinful disposition, letting it reign over us, in order to manifest more clearly the grace of God, was ludicrous to Paul. He doesn’t say it’s an impossibility to let it reign over us, but as far as whether we are to continue living that way Paul found that a horrible thing to contemplate. In verse 2 he says, “May it never be! How shall we who died to the sinful disposition still live in it?” Here he introduces a death that we died. We died spiritually to the unregenerate man that we were and now that we are no longer unregenerate but regenerate we are also dead to the sinful disposition. Death releases all claims. So when we believed we died to the old unregenerate man and it’s sinful disposition that was once our master. So then, having no legal obligation to the sinful disposition should we submit to it? Of course not. In verse 3 Paul asks, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” The baptism that we underwent at the moment of faith in Christ was a Spirit baptism and that killed our old unregenerate self. Verse 4, “Therefore we have been

buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in a new life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

A spiritual parallel to the physical resurrection of Christ took place the moment we believed. Our old man was crucified and buried, we were raised spiritually a new man. In other words, we are regenerate and now we can live a new life. Verse 6 clarifies, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him.” It’s the concept of the “old man” that was so troublesome for me last week and which I have now resolved. The trouble was whether the “old man” was another way of saying “the old sin nature” or whether it was something else. We have good reason to think it is the old unregenerate person that we were prior to faith and not the sin nature. Why? Because it’s not our sin nature that died but we who died. Repeatedly it says we died. Also, if only our sin nature died then Christ didn’t die for us but for only a part of us, our sin nature.

There are also two other passages in the NT that speak of the “old man” and interestingly, in both of them, unlike here, they also mention the fact that we are a “new man.” Let’s turn to the first one, Colossians 3:9. These three passages are all consistent. If you let your eyes scan all the way up to Col 3:1 you see that Paul is talking about the same subject here in Colossians 3 as he is in Romans 6; in verse 1 we have been raised up with Christ, in verse 2 we are instructed to set our mind on the things above, in verse 3 we have died and our lives are hidden with Christ. In verse 5 we are to consider ourselves dead to fleshly things. In verse 7 we are reminded that we once lived in those things. In verse 8, however, we are to lay all those things aside. In verse 9 we are given the reason. Let’s pick up our reading here, “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” Do you see there is an exchange that happened? The old man was exchanged for the new man. This is a figure that comes from changing your clothes. You strip off the old clothes and put on the new clothes. This is an important figure. In verse 9, we stripped off “the old man” and in verse 10 we put on “the new man.” Both are aorist participles signifying a once for all stripping off and a once for all putting on. The figure is saying that metaphysically you are the same person, you have the same name, the same residence, the same vocation, et. al. but something has changed, you are not the same person spiritually that you were before. What then is the old man and the new man? The old man is ourselves as unregenerate; the new man is ourselves as regenerate. At a moment in time when we believe in Christ we went from being unregenerate to regenerate instantaneously. The old man was crucified with Christ, the new man was raised with Christ. Metaphysically we are the same man with the same name, same residence, same vocation, et. Al. but spiritually I am a new man, I’ve been resurrected spiritually. Verse 10 goes on to teach that the regenerate man is now to be transformed. The shift from unregenerate to regenerate is once for all but the transformation is a gradual process throughout the life of the believer. Verse 10 indicates this by the use of the present tense, “being renewed.” Paul is saying that the regenerate man is “being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him,” not has been renewed. This renewal process is the process of sanctification. We can never be ultimately

sanctified until we are face to face with the Lord but now that we are regenerate we are in the process of being renewed in sanctification until that day.

Let's turn to the second passage, Eph 4:22. This one is more difficult because the translators took some liberties with the Greek tense that I would not take. If you scan up to Eph 4:17 you see that the topic again relates to how they should no longer walk now that they are believers. In verses 18-19 he gives the picture of how they once walked as unbelievers. But, verse 20, "you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus." Verse 22 is the teaching they should have learned, "that in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old man, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Do you see the same figure used here as in Col? The figure of changing your clothes? The problem with the translation is that in verse 22 the "laying aside of the old man" and in verse 24 "the putting on of the new self" are translated as commands for the believer to follow when in the Greek they are not commands but statements of fact that are aorist, once-for-all things that happened at the moment they become believers. The old man was laid aside and the new man was put on. Again, you went from being unregenerate to being regenerate instantly at a moment in time. You are the same metaphysical person you were as an unbeliever, but spiritually you have been raised. You see, at the end of verse 24, that the "new man" "has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." That new creature that you are was created at a moment in time. But now the new regenerate person that you are needs as verse 23 says, to "be renewed in the spirit of the mind." That's a present tense and speaks again of the transformation process of sanctification throughout the life of the regenerate man. We need to be transformed in the way we think. That's how the new regenerate man grows spiritually in the process of sanctification.

Now we come back to Romans 6:6. Romans 6:6 also refers to our "old man." Who is that old man? Who we were while still unregenerate. When we believed in Christ we were crucified with Him and spiritually regenerated. He doesn't say here that we are a "new man" like he did in Col and Eph, but we know that we are. How else could he say at the end of verse 4 that we might live a new life? You have to be regenerate in order to live a new life. In verse 6 he goes on to give the purpose for the old man being crucified, "in order that our body of sin might be done away with." Last week I identified the "body of sin" with the total person. Now I've changed my mind. I think the best interpretation is the physical body. And the meaning is that the physical body is possessed by or taken over as a vehicle for the sin nature expressing itself. I'm not saying that the physical body is the source of sin. The physical body is not where the sin is coming from. The sin is coming from the sinful disposition. But the sinful disposition uses the physical body as a vehicle to satisfy its desires.

Before we were regenerate the sin disposition reigned as master over us, expressing itself through our physical bodies. Now our unregenerate man was crucified with Christ so that we are regenerate. The problem comes in that even though we are regenerate we still have the sinful disposition or nature. This is what sets up the conflict

within us that we are going to find because not only do we have a sinful disposition but we also have a new holy disposition and it's these two that wage war within the regenerate man that we are.

That is why we struggle. We are regenerate but we have two dispositions within, one tugging us toward sin and one tugging us toward holiness. The problem we all have is how can my holy disposition win out over the sinful disposition? There has to be something more than just the fact that I am regenerate and have a new holy disposition. That alone won't cut it because Paul in Romans 7 says he has the holy disposition, a desire to do good and he looked at the Law of Moses and said that is a good law and so he tried to keep the Law but when he tried he failed. Why did Paul fail? He had a holy desire to do good. Why couldn't he do good? The answer has to do with the fact that the Law was external to him, it was written on tablets of stone and therefore Paul had to depend upon the flesh in order to do the Law. It was legalism because any dependence on the flesh in order to do good will result in failure. Romans 7 is all about Paul trying legalism to be sanctified; putting himself under a set of external laws and trying to keep those. Paul shows that won't work.

Let's summarize and then move on in Romans 6. What Paul has said is that you were an unregenerate man and legally bound to obey your sin nature which exerted itself through your unregenerate self. When you believed in Christ the Spirit baptized you into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that you are now regenerate and no longer legally bound to obey your sin nature even though you still have one. In addition you have a new nature and these two natures are in conflict. Now we come to the end of verse 6, "so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin." This just means that now that you died to the sin nature so you are no longer legally obligated to obey it. As unregenerate you did have to obey it. It was master and you were slave. Verse 8, "Now if we have died with Christ," and we have, 1st class condition, "we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God." What then is Paul illustrating by Christ's death and resurrection? That since the death of Christ occurred but one time and the resurrection is permanent then it is also true that we, having died with Christ but one time have been raised to live a new life forevermore. In other words, we are now regenerate and though we have the sin nature we no longer have to serve it as master. It once was our master but never again. We are not obligated to obey it. Verse 11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." What's he saying there? That you should calculate something about yourselves as regenerate people; namely that you are not legally obligated to the sin nature, but you are legally obligated to God in Christ Jesus.

That really draws out the picture of who we are and **Therefore** verse 12 begins to give us the imperative commands in light of who we are. The first command is verse 12 a negative command. **Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.** When we were unregenerate our sinful disposition reigned like a king over our mortal bodies so that we continually obeyed its desires. We gladly let it reign. It was

king and we its subjects. A king has rights over his subjects. The king requires obedience. The subjects must render complete submission. Now, having believed we have died and been raised with Christ so that we should no longer **let** the sin nature **reign in our mortal body so that we obey its lusts** as if it were our king and we its subjects. When we do allow the sin nature to be king over us we are committing an act of treason against God, our true King.

The verb in the expression **do not let sin reign** is a present imperative. The imperative mood means it's a command to follow. The command to follow is to not let sin be king over your mortal body. The present tense means this is an ongoing command to follow. We would translate, "keep on not letting the sin disposition be king in your mortal body to fulfill its lusts." This means you are to say "no" every time your sin disposition starts to stir up your fleshly lusts so that it controls you. You have to say 'no' and keep on saying 'no' because the sinful disposition will continue to try and exercise authority over you even though it has no right to do so.

Verse 13 is another negative command. **And do not present your members to the sin nature as instruments of unrighteousness.** The command is to **not present your members to the sin nature.** The verb **present** means to "put at the disposal of, to offer." It is a present tense verb meaning an ongoing command to follow. We would translate, "keep on not presenting your members to the sin nature as instruments of unrighteousness." There is an implication that the moment we stop not presenting our members to the sinful nature we sin. Therefore we must continually follow this command or else we are sinning.

The **members** refer to "the parts of the human body," whether it be the mind where we conceptualize wickedness or the mouth where we speak evil or the hands where we carry it out. These are all parts of our body and we can offer them up to the sin nature to be used **as instruments of unrighteousness.** This is what we should continually avoid (cf v 6).

The word **instruments** originally referred to implements or tools but was most commonly used for "weapons." We would translate "weapons." Paul is viewing the parts of our body as weapons of wickedness when we put them at the disposal of the sinful disposition. Clearly Paul is introducing us to the spiritual warfare that rages within the believer. It's important to observe that this is a spiritual warfare that rages independent of Satan's influence. Satan is another factor not included here because here the war here is not between us and Satan but between the two dispositions within us; the old sinful disposition and the new holy disposition. Even if Satan was locked away, as he will be in the millennium, mortal believers would still be stirred up by their old sinful disposition to sin. Since we are in this war the way to victory is to continually refuse to present the parts of our body to the sinful disposition in order to keep it from exerting its wickedness through us.

Instead, the middle of verse 13 tells us a positive command, **but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.** The command here is for the believer to **present himself to God as alive from the dead.** One **alive from the dead** is one who is spiritually

raised, that is, regenerate. We are to present or offer ourselves to God as regenerate, **and** the parts of our body **as weapons of righteousness to God**, that is, for His purposes. If we can become arrows in God's bow we are **weapons of righteousness**, accomplishing the purposes of God. The command here is also a present tense and so we should "keep on presenting ourselves to God as regenerate and keep on offering the parts of our body to Him as weapons of righteousness." The implication is that when we cease this presentation we are already sinning.

So verse 13 says we have a choice to make at every moment; the option of presenting the parts of our body to our sinful disposition and having them serve as weapons of wickedness or of presenting ourselves as regenerate people to God and the parts of our body as weapons of righteousness. These are both present tense commands, one negative and one positive. Therefore, if we are not doing one we are doing the other. This is looking at the any-moment dimension of sanctification. On this point there is no in-between. At any-moment we are either presenting ourselves to the sinful disposition or we are offering ourselves to God.

Turn to Galatians 5:16. I'm having you turn here because it is vital to see that this is an either-or proposition and that the only way to keep from fulfilling the lusts of the sinful disposition is to continually keep on presenting yourselves to God. This is a conscious presentation. In Gal 5:16 Paul brings in the Holy Spirit. In Rom 8 he will also bring in the Holy Spirit in the same way he is here. He just hasn't got there yet. Notice how this verse is structured. "But I say, walk by the Spirit," present imperative, keep on walking by the Spirit. Because why? Because that is the way to avoid "carrying out the desire of the flesh." What I want you to see is that the way this verse is structured is to say that as long as you are walking by the Spirit you are kept from carrying out the desires of the flesh. But the moment you stop walking by the Spirit you have already switched over and are now carrying out the desire of the flesh. It's one or the other and at any moment you are living one way or the other way! This is the any-moment dimension of sanctification. It's either one or the other. And the only way to avoid carrying out the desires of the sinful disposition, or flesh, is to continually walk by the Spirit.

Let's go back to Romans 6. You have a choice every day, every moment, who you are going to present yourself to, the sinful disposition, in which case your body parts are going to be used as weapons of wickedness or to God as a regenerate person and the parts of your body as weapons of righteousness for God. There's no other possibility.

Verse 14, **For the sin nature shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

Critical verse. He introduces the **master-slave** relationship at this point as an analogy between the sin nature and the believer. I want to introduce this relationship and then the law-grace distinction that Paul is making before we close. Paul personifies sin as a ruling master. Of course, Paul does not mean that sin is a person. In verse 19 he explains that he is using the master-slave relationship to communicate this difficult spiritual truth in human terms. In order to understand Paul's analogy we have to look at the master-slave relationship as it was in the 1st century. Showers says, "The key idea in the word that Paul uses for "master" is that of a legal position of

authority.”¹ In Paul’s day the master had the right to dominate and control every aspect of his slave’s life. There was no room for the slave to exert his own will. The slave was obligated to render complete obedience to the master. When we were unregenerate the sin nature was our master and we it’s slaves, we were obligated to render complete obedience to our sin nature. Now that we are regenerate Paul says **the sin nature shall not be master over you**. Thus, he means that the sinful nature has no legal position of authority over you such that you are obligated to render obedience to it.

Then Paul says, **for you are not under law but under grace**. Those who are “under the law” are subjected to law as a governing principle; those “under grace” are subjected to grace as a governing principle. As a governing principle for daily living, grace is able to do what external law cannot do. Only grace can release a person from the mastery of his sin disposition (that is an incredibly important truth to grasp). Paul goes on to develop this truth further in Romans 7. Paul is declaring here that Christians are not under any “external law” as a means of sanctification – no external law can set a person free from the mastery of his sin disposition. We are set free from the OT law as a rule of life. Instead we are under grace as a rule of life. Grace differs from the law in that it is not external tablets of commandments but a new internal holy disposition and the indwelling Holy Spirit. We will come to realize in our exposition that even though we have a new holy disposition that desires to please God we do not have the capability to please Him. We must learn to depend upon the Holy Spirit if we are to grow into more and more Christ-likeness. This is the only way to avoid allowing the sin nature to rule as master over us. It finally comes down to depending upon the Holy Spirit, which is a frank admission that we do not have the capacity to make ourselves like Christ. Only He can do that.

In conclusion, verse 12 is a negative command to follow. “Do not let the sin nature reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.” The sin nature is likened to a king that requires the obedience of the slave. As unbelievers our sin nature was the king and we were subject to obey its lusts. Now we are regenerate and still have the sin nature but do not have to obey it because it is no longer our king and therefore has no legal rights over us. Yet it still tries to reign over us. We have the continual responsibility to not let it. In verse 13 another negative command to follow, “do not go on presenting the members of your body to the sin as weapons of unrighteousness.” This is a possibility but it is an option we should not exercise because it makes us a weapon of unrighteousness. Instead, “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God.” Daily and continually we should offer ourselves to God as the new men that we are, regenerate, and the parts of our body as His weapons. Verse 14 explains, “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. Sin had legal rights as our master when we were unregenerate. We had to obey it. We had no room for self-will. But now that we are regenerate we do not have to obey it. If we put ourselves under law as a governing principle we will only stir up the lusts of the sinful disposition. It is not a principle of victory but failure. Instead we are under grace. This grace as a governing principle means that we have an inward disposition to holiness and the indwelling Spirit that Paul will elaborate on in Rom 7 and 8. It is not enough to have the inward disposition. But reliance upon the Holy Spirit is sufficient.

What can we learn? First, you are not the old unregenerate man anymore. Metaphysically you are the same person but not spiritually; spiritually you are regenerate. Second, you are no longer legally obligated to the sinful disposition. You still have the sinful disposition but it is no longer to be master over you. Third, you are not under law but grace. The law was an external set of rules. When you put yourself under an external set of rules and self-effort the sinful disposition exerts itself against the rules to fulfill its lusts and we fail. We are under grace. This grace is the new disposition to holiness and the indwelling Spirit of God. Fourth, having a new disposition and desiring to please God is not sufficient. We do not have it within ourselves to transform ourselves into Christ-likeness. Fifth, only when we rely on the indwelling Spirit can we overcome the sinful disposition and live a new life to God. He is the one who transforms us into Christ-likeness.

¹ Renald Showers, *The New Nature*, p 63-64.