

Experiencing Freedom from Sin

Romans 6:12-14

Sometime last summer Brenda and I were at a friend's house. There we met a guy, John, whose grandfather was a cooper (he made barrels for a living). We talked about woodworking quite a bit. A few days later this friend-of-a-friend called me up and asked me if I would like to have his grandfather's coopering tools. He actually wanted to give me these antique tools. Of course I said yes. And so John gave me all sorts of amazing coopering tools such as these: {Photo #1 - tools}

This is far and away my favorite coopering tool: {Photo #2 - Cooper's drawknife} This is a big, beefy nine-pound drawknife. The one I normally use in chair making weighs less than a pound. This drawknife is used to hollow out the inside of barrel staves.

Here is another cool tool called a croze: {Photo #3 - croze}. After the barrel is put together, the croze cuts the groove inside the barrel for the lid and the bottom of the barrel. It's a very cool, specialized tool.

Each of these tools has a specific purpose. I don't know how to use them yet, but with some instruction and some practice I could learn to use each of these tools properly. Used correctly and skillfully I could make barrels that are not only beautiful but useful. Of course, I could misuse these tools in all sorts of ways: I could use this draw knife as a doorstop or a stake in the ground; I could use this croze to clean out the gutters on my house. But that would be lame and wrong. Tools should be used properly for their intended purpose.

I tell you all of this because the passages we are studying this week and next urge us to view the members of our bodies as "instruments" or "tools" that need to be used for the right purpose. In today's passage, Romans 6:12-14, Paul writes, "Do not go on presenting the members of your bodies to sin as instruments of unrighteousness." That's not proper for us as Jesus' followers to use the members of our bodies as tools to produce unrighteousness/sin. Instead, Paul writes, "present . . . your members as instruments of righteousness to God." The members of our bodies are instruments that (when used properly) can produce the beautiful and useful fruit of righteousness.

This morning we'll emphasize not misusing the members of our bodies by presenting them to sin; next week we'll talk about using them properly by presenting them to God for His purposes. Our walks with God were never meant to be merely an internal, mental experience. A healthy walk with God involves employing the members of our body in beautiful and useful ways. That's what we'll talk about this week and next.

Last week Brian taught from Romans 6:1-11. We saw in verse 11 how Paul urges us to conclude that because we are united with Christ that we are "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Sin is no longer our master; we are now as alive to God as Jesus Himself. We aren't merely pretending that this is true; this is actually true because we are "in Christ." Based on this spiritual reality, Paul writes this in verses 12-14:

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

After we work our way through this passage, we'll ask three questions that will help us apply what we've learned.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

The greatest threats to our freedom are the lusts that reside in our "mortal bodies." Our earthly bodies are mortal, meaning that they are subject to deterioration, disease, and death. We will one day have immortal bodies akin to Jesus' resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:53). But in this world we have mortal bodies that have lusts. Our bodies themselves are not evil; but our bodies can be used for evil if we obey their lusts.

The term lust simply means a strong, intense desire. Sometimes the term is used in a neutral sense (e.g. Philippians 1:23), but most often - as here - it has the connotation of a strong, intense, **sinful** desire. Of course lusts can be sexual when we intensely desire some type of illicit sexual experience/gratification. But lust can also be a strong, sinful desire for money, power, fame, revenge, attention, respect, food, or drink. These are desires that can dominate our lives; they can become our masters, and we become enslaved to them.

That's why Paul says, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." When we obey our bodily lusts, sin reigns in our lives. Paul commands us to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies because ***sin has been dethroned by the death and resurrection of Jesus***. Paul is telling us to engage our wills so that we might experience the freedom won for us by Christ.

The determining factor is what we do with our bodies, specifically the individual members of our bodies. That's what Paul discusses throughout the rest of Romans 6. In verse 13 Paul tells us what we ***shouldn't*** do with our bodies and what we ***should*** do with our bodies.

13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

As in verse 12 Paul uses the present tense, indicating that this is something we must continually do: instead of continually presenting the members of our bodies to sin we should continually present the members of our bodies to God. Paul is talking about the physical/material parts of our bodies (eyes, mouth, hands, feet, etc.). [The term "instrument" sometimes has the connotation of weapon (see 2 Corinthians 10:4, John 18:3).] The members of our bodies can either be used as "instruments of

unrighteousness” or “instruments of righteousness.” The question is whether or not we are using the members of our bodies for their intended purpose.

This is a theme throughout the New Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 Paul wrote:

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

We have been bought at the highest possible cost, the blood of Jesus. Our bodies are the dwelling place (temple) of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it only makes sense that we use our bodies to show people just how glorious God is: we glorify God by using the members of our bodies skillfully as instruments/tools of righteousness.

Whether we realize it or not, many, many times each day you and I present the members of our bodies either to sin or to God. In effect, sometime we utilize many different members of our bodies in a prolonged sinful expression: “I am going to dwell upon all the ways I have been wronged by _____. I am going to use my feet and legs to walk over to that person. And then I’m going to use my mind to construct the harshest insults I can imagine. Then I’m going to speak those insults with my mouth and lips and tongue. And then I’m going to use my hands and face and body language to express anger.” Normally we’re not nearly that intentional. But I hope you see an “outburst of anger” involves presenting many different members of our bodies to sin as an instrument/tool that produces unrighteousness.

The presupposition here is that we are responsible to not let this happen; in other words, we are “able to respond” when we experience the lusts of the flesh. Instead of being passive, we are responsible to engage our wills and intentionally avoid allowing the members of our bodies to be instruments of sin. Because we are “alive from the dead,” we should no longer use the members of our bodies for sin and death.

Rather, Paul writes in verse 13, “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” We’ll talk about this in detail next week when we consider verses 15-23. But the idea is that we live in a way that is compatible with being alive to God through Christ. We present the members of our bodies to God so that we might further His righteous purposes. “Here, God, I present to you my mind to think Your thoughts. I present my eyes to see people and circumstances the way you do. I present my mouth/tongue to You to speak words of truth and words of healing - the very things You would say if You were standing here.”

The vision is to use the members of our bodies as instruments in the hands of God to produce beautiful and useful results. We’ll discuss this further next week. But in verse 14 Paul returns to the issue of not allowing sin to dominate our lives. He makes a rather powerful statement that implicitly includes a promise:

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

The first half of this verse could be translated, “For sin will not have lordship over you.” This is Paul’s summary of verses 1-11 that we studied last week. Sin has been de-throned in our lives through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because we have been freed from mastery of sin, “sin **shall not** be master over us.”

Somewhat unexpectedly (so Kruse, p. 269) Paul supports this point by mentioning that believers are not “under law but under grace.” Why would Paul reintroduce the point that those who follow Jesus no longer live under the demands of the Law? His argument throughout Romans is that both the Law **and** grace achieve exactly the opposite of what his opponents claimed. They argued that the Law kept people from sinning whereas grace gave people permission to sin without consequences. Paul wrote that the opposite is true.

First, the Law never had the capacity to produce obedience. The Law exposed sin (5:20, 7:7), and the Law incited sin (7:8-12); but the Law never produced obedience. Second, grace accomplished what the Law could never do; the grace we have received in Christ Jesus allows us to obey God from the heart. In essence, Paul is saying that the reason sin shall not be over us is because we are not living under the old covenant in which sin and death reigned; we are living under the new covenant in which the grace of God reigns. Doug Moo makes the point that if sin still reigned in our lives, Paul’s statement, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies” would be like telling a drowning person simply to swim to shore. That would be cruel and impossible.

But in this context the command, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies” is reasonable and even obvious. Because sin is no longer our master, of course we shouldn’t let sin reign in our bodies to obey its lusts.

By way of application, evaluate your own life using the categories Paul introduces in this passage. I’d encourage you to take some time this week to be honest before God (and before another person that you trust). Evaluate your life using these three questions:

What “lusts” (intense, sinful desires) do I commonly experience?

These are the sinful things that we crave. Some of our lusts are probably quite obvious, but there may be lusts that we’ve never really named. They’ve flown under the radar; these are our stealth lusts. In order to help us identify such lusts, I’m going to read a portion of Galatians 5 that lists the “deeds of the flesh.” Behind each of these deeds are sinful desires.

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

One cluster of sins mentioned involve sexual sins: immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Behind those deeds of the flesh are sexual desires. If you are consumed by sensuality you may think that such desires are impossible to resist; you may think that sexual sins have mastery over you (that they are your master and you are their slave). This is where you have to decide whether Paul's teaching in Romans 6 is truth/reality or make-believe. If you are "in Christ," those sins are not your master. You need to name them and not let them reign in your mortal body.

Another cluster of sins mentioned involve disunity: strife, disputes, dissensions, factions. If you find that you are continually experiencing such disunity with others, there may be any number of sinful desires that are driving your behavior: some form of pride (thinking that you're better than others), a critical spirit (you're fixated on things that others do wrong), desire to have everybody like you (therefore you never speak the truth in love). If you're going to avoid strife and disunity with others, you're going to have to name the lusts that are driving your behavior. And you're going to have to believe that Paul was right when he wrote that we're no longer enslaved to sin.

In response to these lusts, what ways do I commonly "present the members of my body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness"? Paul wrote, "do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness." If we take Paul seriously, we'll identify the ways we commonly do this.

When it comes to sexual lusts, we have evaluate what our eyes see. The point here isn't self-condemnation; there's no spiritual benefit in that. The point is to identify ways in which we've been saying, "I am going to present my eyes to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. With my eyes and my mind I am now going to feed the sensual cravings of my flesh so that I will sin." If we are going to turn away from such habits, we have to understand them in this way.

When it comes to strife and disunity, we have to evaluate whether we've allowed our minds to dwell on things that aren't profitable, whether we've allowed our ears to hear slander and gossip, whether we've used our mouths to speak things that are unkind, whether we've used our fingers to type words that lack compassion. Again, we need to identify ways that we've used the members of our bodies for the wrong purposes.

There is value in using biblical categories in order to see the wisdom and the power of biblical truth. It's not very helpful to admit, "I struggling in some areas of my life." But there's great clarify and insight in admitting, "I've been presenting the members of my body to sin; that's why my life is producing so much unrighteousness." Without this type of clarity, our repentance will be vague and muddled. But with this clarity, our repentance will be very specific and tangible. This leads to the third question:

Am I willing to learn to "present the members of my body to God as instruments of righteousness"? Next week we'll consider the rest of chapter 6 in which Paul teaches that we really only have two options: either presenting the members of our bodies to sin or to God; everybody serves somebody. The goal of "not sinning" isn't enough. Not sinning is better than sinning, but it's not enough. It's good that I not use

that cooper's drawknife to pull nails or as a doorstep. But it's best that I use it to make barrels. In the same way it's good that we not use our mouths to tear people down, but it's best that we speak words of grace to meet the need of the moment.

We have to get to the place where our deepest desire is to honor God with the members of our bodies. In this way we use the members of our bodies for their intended purpose. This week as you evaluate your habits, wrestle with whether or not you are willing to learn obedience. It will take time and effort. But it's worth it because we were bought with a price; therefore we should glorify God with our bodies.