

The First Imperative

Romans 6:11–14¹

All Have Sinned.

We have been taking a slow journey through Romans chapter 6, as a part of our series on Romans, and this morning, I want to actually take a couple of steps back, and go just a little bit slower, because there's something here in the text that was read for us a moment ago that we need to be certain not to miss. See, last Lord's Day, we reached verse 14, where Paul declared:

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:14 ESV

Please remember that because we'll come back to it eventually. The thing is, this profound statement of doctrine *can* be thought of as a culmination, not only of all that has gone before in Romans chapter 6, but of all that has gone before in Paul's entire letter to the Romans.

Remember, we started off with a four point outline for the book: sin, salvation, sovereignty and service. If we had space on the wall for a fifth banner, we might have added sanctification to the mix between salvation and sovereignty. Regardless, before we move on from this point in chapter 6, let me recap where we have been.

After a thorough look at the effects of sin on the entire human race (a race made up, of course, by individuals like ourselves, *all* of whom are sinners in our own right), in chapter 3, verse 21, Paul went on to state:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... Romans 3:21–25 ESV

And from that point on, the emphasis has been on this righteousness that we receive by grace through faith, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This led to the summary of God's grace given in chapter 5, verses 1 – 5:

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

¹ All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:1-5 ESV

By the way, that's not only a summary of God's grace toward us, it's a fair summary of the Christian life as a whole. We have been justified by faith; we have peace with God; we stand in grace; and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. All of this allows us to rejoice even in our sufferings, because we know that even in (and perhaps especially in) our sufferings, God is at work to sanctify us and make us into the people that He has called us to be. But that's a whole nother sermon.

Not by Works of Righteousness.

Getting back on track then, we see that all people (both Jews and gentiles) sin, and we sin because we actually suppress the truth of God by our own unrighteousness. The problem is not intellectual then; it's moral. And that's why the works of the law could never save. Because it's not as though bad works and good works are entirely separate categories such that they could be weighed on a scale to see whether or not one might surpass the other. So-called "bad deeds" are, by definition, those occasions on which we fail to comply with the requirements of God's Law.

Think of it this way. The third commandment, found in Exodus chapter 20, verse 7, is:

⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Exodus 20:7 ESV

So, well and good. We understand that the commandment requires that we **not** take the name of the Lord in vain. But what if we do? What if, just yesterday, someone took the name of the Lord in vain. Well, that constitutes a sin. It's a violation of the law as all sins are. The Apostle John wrote:

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; **sin is lawlessness.** 1 John 3:4 ESV

So, there we have it. Taking the Lord's name in vain is a sin—it is lawlessness—and in the commandment itself, God said that He will not hold guiltless anyone who does such a thing. Now some would say, "Yes, there's this bad thing,"—they might call it a "swear"—"that falls on the negative side of the scale. OK. But having taken the Lord's name in vain on Saturday, can't we just make up for it by honoring the Lord's name on Sunday?" (I chose this example on purpose).

But here's the thing... the good is *always* required, so, when put into a position where we either honor the Lord's name or take it in vain yet again, we can't make up for having taken it in vain on Saturday by honoring it on Sunday, nor could we make up for having taken it in vain last Sunday by honoring it today. Good works—works that are consistent with the law of God—are **always** required, and can never discharge the debt of past sin, never mind the debt of original sin (the sin that we are born with as the children of Adam).

All of that was for this; the works of the law **cannot** save. They never could and they never will. Romans 5 ends by making this abundantly clear. Paul wrote:

²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:20–21 ESV

Salvation, then, is not by works of righteousness that we have done. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. There is no other way. If we think that maybe someone could be good enough, we need to disabuse ourselves of the very notion. We cannot be “good enough” because there’s no such thing as “good enough”. Jesus said,

⁶ ...“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father** except through me. John 14:6 ESV²

And, let me say it again (because it can never be said too often), we come to Him—we come to Jesus—by grace alone, through faith alone. There is no other way.

¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” Romans 10:10–11 ESV

Shall We Continue in Sin?

But this leads us to where we have been since restarting the series on Romans, that simple question at the beginning of chapter 6.

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Romans 6:1 ESV

Since salvation cannot be achieved by works of righteousness that we might do, and is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, doesn’t it follow that we could just keep on in the same old way that we have been going—that we could continue on in sin—and all so that grace might abound all the more?

Well of course not. Paul wrote:

² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:2–4 ESV

And then, all that heavy doctrine in verses 5 – 10:

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

² John 14:6 (ESV), emphasis mine.

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ **We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.** ¹⁰ **For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.** Romans 6:5–10 ESV

And this is why what we saw last week is so important. Verse 9, again:

⁹ **We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.** Romans 6:9 ESV

And in the very same way, as really and truly as death can never again have dominion of Jesus Christ,

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

So, if we believe that Jesus, our faithful Savior, has been raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, and seated at God's right hand to reign until all His enemies have been made a footstool for His feet, and that He is now fully and finally beyond all the power of death and the grave, then we **must** also believe—we **must** trust—that in the same way, those who have been raised up with Him to walk in newness of life have passed beyond the dominion—the rule, the reign, the tyranny—of sin.

This is simply the truth. This is the word of the Lord. We cannot explain it away, and why would we want to? Why would we want to negate in any way this statement that sin **will** not have dominion over us, because sin **cannot** have dominion over us? Why would we not rejoice and live in the truth that having died with Christ, we have been raised up, not so that we can continue under the dominion of sin, but so that we can walk in newness of life. All of Romans so far has been building to this point.

The First Imperative.

How do we know this? Well, look again at Romans 6, verse 11.

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

And this is the thing I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon that we need to be certain not to miss. I failed to emphasize it last week, and I want to correct that. The thing is, this verse, Romans 6, verse 11 “is literally the first word of exhortation in the epistle to the Romans,”³ as Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out in his commentary. He went on to write:

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans (Volume 5): The New Man* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 111.

Until we reach this eleventh verse of chapter 6 [Romans] has been nothing but sheer doctrine. The entire first five chapters and nearly half the sixth consist of exposition and doctrine. You cannot come to application and to practice, to conduct and behavior and experience, until you are clear about the doctrine. That is the great lesson we should learn at this point...So far we have simply been told the truth about ourselves. Now the Apostle wants us to lay hold of it, to realize it, and to begin to apply it.⁴

And I don't think we can overemphasize this point. This is Paul's usual method—doctrine first, and then application—but this is huge. The doctrine that we have been looking at up to this point takes up as much or more space than the entire letter to the Galatians, or the Ephesians, or the Philippians. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and in preparation for this exhortation has laid down this airtight doctrinal case. Everything that we have seen, everything that we have learned, to this point leads us to the imperative—the command—of verse 11.

We are all sinners who deserve nothing from God but judgment and wrath. More still, in our own strength, we can do nothing about this.

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. Romans 2:12 ESV

and literally,

²³ ...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... Romans 3:23 ESV

But thanks be to God! Just as Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, it will be counted the same,

²⁴ ...to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:24–25 ESV

And,

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 ESV

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Romans 5:6–9 ESV

Oh, how wonderful. Oh, how marvelous, as the hymn-writer put it.

³ ...all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 111.

raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ^{Romans}
6:3-4 ESV

That's the doctrine. That's the teaching of Romans so far. But now what? How shall we then live? And here it is, in Romans 6, verse 11, the real turning point in the book; the point where Paul brings it home. Just as certainly as all of these things are true (and they are true, and we know them to be true, because this is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ), even so,

¹¹ ...you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ^{Romans}
6:11 ESV

This is the first imperative. This is the command. This is the word of the Lord. This is the first step in living out our sanctification.

¹¹ Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. ^{Romans 6:11 ASV5}

And why must we make this calculation? Because it's absolutely essential to the second imperative in the book of Romans (and all of this was simply the introduction to that).

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: ^{Romans 6:12 ASV}

If the Lord is willing, we will focus on the second imperative next Lord's Day, but again, I want us to understand that this is something that we are required to do, and it is something that we **can** do.

Does sin reign in your life and body? It doesn't have to. You are not a victim. In Christ you have been brought from death to life, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, and this must be our battle cry.

Christus vincit! Christus regnat! Christus imperat!

Christ conquers, Christ reigns, and Christ commands. And here is His command.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ^{Romans 6:12}
ESV

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ^{Romans 6:14 ESV}