

How to Not Sin.

Romans 6:11–19¹

Sin is Lawlessness.

What is sin, asks an old Presbyterian catechism for young children. They were taught to answer (even at their very young age):

Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the Law of God.²

But what is meant by “want of conformity”? (By the way, a four year old can learn these things. Ask me later how I know. It’s a good story.) What is meant by “transgression”? Well, “want of conformity” means,

Not being or doing what God requires.³

And “transgression”? It means,

Doing what God forbids.⁴

Even so, the Apostle John wrote in 1 John chapter 3, verse 4:

⁴ ...sin is lawlessness. ^{1 John 3:4} ESV

So, that’s what sin is—lawlessness—and that’s exactly what Paul was addressing in Romans 6, verse 12, when he wrote:

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

Let not lawlessness reign in your mortal body. In other words, don’t fail to do or to be what God requires in His law, and don’t do what He forbids either. Just don’t. Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body. As to what it looks like when sin does reign there, well, we could go to Galatians, chapter 5. It’s familiar, because we all like the list there which covers “the fruit of the Spirit”, but just before that one we get another list. Galatians 5, beginning in verse 16:

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires **of the flesh**. ^{Galatians 5:16} ESV

Now just a note here, if you’re reading from the New International Version, it says,

¹⁶ ...the desires **of the sinful nature**. ^{Galatians 5:16} NIV845

The thing is, it’s a single Greek word σάρξ [sarx], and it means, simply, “flesh”, just like it’s translated in the English Standard, the American Standard, the New American Standard, the King James, and the New King James too; simply “flesh”. If Paul had been inclined (or had been inspired) to write “sinful nature”, there were Greek words available for him to do that, but instead he wrote

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

² *Catechism for Young Children* (Great Commission Publications: Philadelphia, PA), 5–6.

³ *Catechism*, 6.

⁴ *Catechism*, 6.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

¹⁶ ...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires **of the flesh**. Galatians 5:16 ESV

as in, the desires of the body, and specifically, the desires of the mortal body we were talking about in Romans 6; that flesh—the flesh we were born with; the flesh in which we will walk until the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised,

⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body... ¹ Corinthians 15:53 ESV

(same word there in 1 Corinthians 15 as in Romans 6, by the way). “This mortal body” then, in which we are not to let sin reign,

...must put on immortality. ¹ Corinthians 15:53 ESV

And furthermore,

⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ¹ Corinthians 15:53–54 ESV

And that, our mortal body, is what is spoken of in both Romans 6 and Galatians 5, and it is the desires of that mortal body,

¹⁷ ...**the desires of the flesh**... Galatians 5:17 ESV

which

...are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:17 ESV

We will come back to this in Romans 7 of course. For now, note the repetition of yet another idea found in Romans 6. Galatians 5, verse 18:

¹⁸ ...if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the law**. Galatians 5:18 ESV

And yet,

¹⁹ ...**the works of the flesh**... Galatians 5:18–19 ESV

(the works of the mortal body),

...are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery... Galatians 5:19–20 ESV

And, again, we'd like to think that we're pretty safe on those counts, but Paul continues (and these too are the works of the flesh—the sins of the mortal body:

...enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:17–21 ESV

And *all* God's people said, “Ouch, ouch, ouch.” There are, of course, other, similar, lists in Scripture, but this should be adequate. When Paul says,

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

these are the sort of sins that **we** might allow to reign there.

We Have Met the Enemy...

But just who is it who is not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies? Well, us—the church; the people of God; believers; followers of Jesus. How do we know this (apart from the fact that telling an unbeliever to not let sin reign is like yelling at the sun not to rise)? Romans 6, verse 6:

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. Romans 6:6 ESV

This can *only* apply to believers. We are those who have been crucified with Christ, so that we can reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin. Then there's verse 14:

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

Again, this is true only of those who have come to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Unless we have been born again by the grace of God, sin absolutely has dominion. We were “dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] walked.”⁶ Writing in Romans 6, verse 19, Paul said that we

¹⁹ ...once presented [our] members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness... Romans 6:19 ESV

So, we were dead, but in Christ we are alive. We were slaves, but now we have been set free. The mortal bodies in view, then, are these mortal bodies in which redeemed, immortal souls are resident. They are our bodies, and we, having been brought from death to life, are not to present the various parts of our mortal bodies to sin, as instruments—as tools, or even weapons—of unrighteousness.

So, the commandment here (the exhortation; the imperative), is for *us*. Paul is not telling unbelievers to stop sinning. He's telling the church—the saints; the sanctified ones—who are at Rome. He's telling us, and of course he is. What is the point of our salvation if not that we now walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we've been called—

¹⁰ ...in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God... Colossians 1:10 ESV

We were not saved so that we could go to heaven when we die. We were not saved so that we could be happy in this world. We were saved for the glory of God, and we are called to live sanctified lives—to be “holy in all [our] conduct”⁷ for the same reason. As a believer—as

⁶ Cf. Ephesians 2:1 (ESV).

⁷ Cf. 1 Peter 1:15 (ESV).

a follower of Jesus Christ—“Your body”, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6 (your “mortal body”, the body sitting here in these pews right now),

¹⁹ ...is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God... 1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV

and for this reason,

...You are not your own... 1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV

Oddly enough, we profess that our only comfort in life and in death is that we are not our own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, but we don't often work out the implications. You are not your own, so you are not free to do as you please now that you have been saved from the consequences of sin,

²⁰ ...you were bought with a price. **[Therefore]** glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV

How to Not Sin.

And how? Well, three verses in Romans 6. First, verse 11:

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

So, the first instruction in this lesson on how not to sin is really pretty simple. Reckon, understand, remember and believe the reality of who you are in Christ at all times of temptation. Reckon yourself to be dead to sin because in Christ, you are, and

⁷ ...one who has died **has been set free from sin.** Romans 6:7 ESV

And that's right now. It's the very Word of the Living God for you this morning.

But practically speaking, how are you to do this? Well, the answer is not easy, but it is simple. Psalm 119, verse 11:

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart... Psalm 119:11 ESV

¹¹ Thy word have I hid in mine heart... Psalm 119:11 KJV8

I have taken the time and trouble to memorize your word. When my brain—that is, the brain in my mortal body—said, “You cannot do this! You're too old to memorize. This is not your preferred learning method.” I said, “I will present my body (including my brain) as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, because this is nothing more than my reasonable service.” Then I turned off the movie, or the game, I stopped whatever else it was that I was doing to fill the time and got to work hiding Your word in my heart,

...that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11 ESV

And even if it's true, and you really **can't** memorize, then sit down and write God's Word out in your own hand—this was something that was required of all the kings of Israel, and it's consistent with God's instruction in Deuteronomy 6. There, He said,

⁶ ...these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. Deuteronomy 6:6 ESV

(Sounds like memory work to me.) Furthermore,

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, **and shall talk of them** when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 ESV

Do we do this? Is the word of God a topic of daily conversation in our homes? The thing is, one of the best ways to learn and remember something yourself is to prepare properly, and then go out of your way to teach it to others—our children and grandchildren would be a good place to start.

And if you still can't remember—if you truly **cannot** memorize—then take the page on which you wrote it out, fold it up, and carry it around in your pocket, purse, or wallet, ready always to pull it out when you experience the attacks of the devil, the world, or even your own flesh. In Deuteronomy, God went on to say,

⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ **You shall write them** on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 ESV

And maybe this wasn't meant to be taken as literally as some in Israel did, but you could do far worse than decorating the walls of your home with the word of God. It used to be that people would put decals on the walls that said, "Live well. Laugh often. Love much," but how about this on our walls instead, "Deny self. Take up your cross daily. Follow Jesus." If we can't memorize Luke 9:23, we can at least paint it on our walls.

So, first, reckon and remind yourself whenever you are tempted that you are dead to whatever desire is currently trying to lead you astray. If you are a young person struggling with the lust of the flesh, and something catches your eye, maybe personalize Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. Say, "What shall I say then? Am I to continue in lust (or greed, or gossip, or slanderer, or insolence, or boasting, or disobedience to parents—whatever it is; fill in the blank), that grace may abound? Not no how. Not no way! (That's a literal translation of "may it never be!" by the way). How can I, who died to (the sin mentioned above) still continue to live in it?" This is step one.

Step two is even simpler, and I guarantee you will not need to write this down to remember it. It's just two words (and some of you already know). Stop it! Just stop. That's the very simple, plain, literal meaning of verse 12:

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

You don't have too, Paul said, so just don't. Now someone might say, "I just cannot help myself. I am driven by desire like a sailboat in the eye of a hurricane. I am simply swept along. I am a victim of the devil, the world (read, circumstance), and even my own flesh." But in Christ, you are not a victim. Romans 8, verses 35 – 37 have a *slightly* different focus, but the point is the same.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...³⁷ No, in all these things **we are more than conquerors** through him who loved us. Romans 8:35–37 ESV

In Christ, we have conquered the devil, the world, and yes, even our own flesh (that was last week's message). In Christ, we are more than conquerors so stop thinking of yourself as a victim of external people, things, and circumstances. Stop blaming others—stop blaming forces that you cannot control—and start walking in the victory that Christ purchased for you with His own precious blood.

And finally, step three; verse 13.

¹³ Do not present your members to sin as **[weapons]** for unrighteousness... Romans 6:13 ESV

(just stop it; do not let sin reign in your mortal body), instead,

...present yourselves to God... Romans 6:13 ESV

(give yourselves to God as an offering, as a sacrifice)

...as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as [weapons] for righteousness. Romans 6:13 ESV

And here endeth the lesson. This is how to not sin. First, reckon yourself to be dead to that which would hold you in slavery. Then, stop it! Just say no. You don't have to, nothing can make you, so just don't. Apply scripture as often as required to simply not let sin reign in your mortal body. And finally, take that body in which sin so desires to reign, and let God reign. Again, you will have to apply Scripture here, so you will have to actually know Scripture and obey it. This is how you let God reign. This is how you take your mortal body and offer it to God to use for His glory and holiness.

Everything that we have seen in Romans has brought us finally to this point. The panoramic view of sin and salvation that Paul presented was meant to show us the way forward—to show us that we are no longer sin's slaves, but God's free men; to show us that in Christ, we are more than conquerors, and we are meant to live this out to the glory of God. So, let not sin reign in your mortal body to make you obey its lusts, instead:

¹⁵ ...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:15–17 ESV

¹⁴ **For sin shall not have dominion over you:** for [you] are not under the law, but under grace. Romans 6:14 KJV