

Romans: The Hope of Righteousness (part 5 of 9)

How to be an Instrument of Righteousness

Romans 6:11-14

Mark Vroegop

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:11–14 (ESV)

One of the reasons that I love the sixth chapter of Romans is because of the hope and power that it offers. The content of this particular section of Scripture is incredibly practical as we learn how to defeat the power of sin in our lives. It is a passage that shows us how the gospel really works.

But therein lies the problem for so many people who claim to be Christians. There is often a tragic disconnect between what the Bible says about freedom from sin and where they actually live. The effect is doubly negative. First, living with this disconnect causes them to fail to marvel in the beauty of what the Bible is really saying. Therefore, they do not know how incredible the gospel really is. They are robbed of joy. Second, they do not experience the practical freedom from the hold that sin, especially certain sins, has on them. Therefore, they do not know how free they could be. They are robbed of freedom. They could be liberated, but they are in bondage.

Just think with me for a moment about a sin in your life over which you would love to have more victory. How much pain has that sin created for you or for others around you? How many tears have you shed, and how much guilt have you felt, because of that one issue in your life? What would life be like if that particular sin issue was no longer a problem? What would it be like to see that sin become less and less powerful?

I hope, in some small way, for you to be helped by our study of Romans 6 today. My prayer is that you will be able to see some new things about yourself, the message of the Bible, and how to defeat sin. I hope that the Lord will motivate you to take one or two tangible action steps in light of what you see in the text today. My aim is to help you learn to live in this glorious chapter.

Last week we looked at verses 1-11, and we talked about the concept of beauty. I suggested to you that the most beautiful thing in all the earth is a God-glorifying, sin-defeating, Christ-following Christian. We learned that the gospel is meant to work because we share in the victory of Christ.

Three Keys to Becoming an Instrument of Righteousness

Verses 11-14 help us to take another step in our journey toward freedom, and I want to try to put some handles on the truths that are contained in this great section of Scripture. There are many things that the Bible calls us to be or to do, but let me distill what we find here into three important points:

1. You must connect thinking and doing
2. You must think biblically
3. You must take the right actions

Now I don't know where you are spiritually, but there is surely something here for all of us.

1. You must connect thinking and doing (v. 11a)

Verse 11 begins with three important words: "So you also . . ." and highlights a very important connection between thinking and doing. These three words serve as an introduction and a turning point in this sixth chapter.

In verse 10 we read: "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." This verse summarizes the gospel-work of Jesus. He died to sin, and He lives to God. What's more, if you look back to verse 9, you will see that the effect of this was that the dominion of death was canceled. Death no longer had a hold on Jesus because He died to sin and lives to God.

When Paul says, "So you also," he wants believers to see themselves as personally united to Christ. Remember all the "with or into" statements that we looked at last week? (e.g., baptized with Christ, buried with him, as Christ . . . we too, united with Him, live with Him, etc.) A believer's union with Christ means that God counts what happened to Jesus as happening to all who are "in Christ."

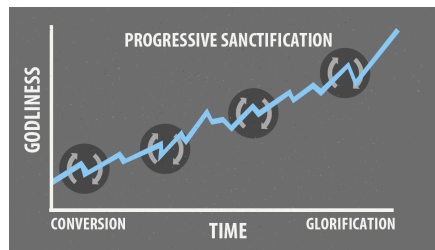
But verse 11 is even more personal because the Greek word "you" is emphatic. It does not have to be listed specifically in the sentence; it is there for emphasis. Paul does this because he is moving the theoretical union concept toward action, and that requires a level of personal ownership. Paul is driving theological realities into personal application because union with Christ is a powerful and personal reality.

Paul is now starting to make commands where he used to only make statements. Notice the following words and phrases: consider (v. 11), let not sin reign (v.12), do not present (v. 13), and present your members (v. 13). They are all imperatives. This is a very significant shift because nearly all of Romans to this point was indicatives – statements of fact about who believers are. But now Paul helps us to see a more complete picture and the pathway to freedom. What do I mean?

Growing in godliness, freedom from sin, and progressive sanctification involve both indicatives (being statements) and imperatives (calls to action). You must have both. A follower of Jesus has to understand and believe that certain things are true in terms of his or her identity and union with Christ. But that belief must also lead to tangible, real, and physical action steps. In the same way that you need two legs to walk, you need indicatives and imperatives to deal with sin.



Indicatives are where it all begins because there are truths that must be believed. But true belief does more than just acknowledge things to be true. Belief acts upon it. And when action is added to belief, it serves to strengthen belief, which, in turn, leads to more action. Indicatives and imperatives are connected, and sanctification is the progressive application of both over time.



Actions without understanding of who you are “in Christ” leads to legalism and self-trusting will power. Knowing who you are in Christ, without decisive actions of righteousness, leads to license and a laissez-faire Christianity. You need both indicatives (who you are in Christ) and imperatives (commands to be followed). Indicatives strengthen imperatives, which strengthen indicatives, which strengthen imperatives. Let me show you this concept in the book of Philippians. Take note of the connection between Paul’s position, his effort, and how that leads to a greater focus on his position.

*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on **to make it my own**, because Christ Jesus **has made me his own**. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12–14 (ESV)*

Followers of Jesus are called to make righteousness their own because Jesus has made us His own. I am called to “take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (NIV). The indicatives of Romans 4, 5, and 6:1-10 must be matched with the imperatives of Romans 6:11-23.

So that then leads me to make an observation and to ask you a question. When it comes to spiritual growth, it appears to me that most of us have a tendency toward indicatives or imperatives. Some of us just want to “do something” while others want to spend more time thinking and meditating on the truths or reasons behind spiritual growth. There seems to be “why?” people, and there seems to be “what?” people. And I think it is helpful to consider your bias so that you can become more balanced.

Second, I think it is helpful for us to consider if we have the indicative/imperative cycle in balance. Perhaps because of your personality or your reaction to your church background or because you are in a particular season in life, you may need to think through whether your spiritual focus should be directed toward indicatives (“Who am I in Christ?”) or imperatives (“What specific steps do I need to take?”). Some of you may need to spend more time digging and discovering the beautiful realities of your union with Christ. You need to read great literature, meditate on the power of Christ, and bask in the sunshine of truth.

Others need to “lay hold” of what you are doing. You need to not go to certain places, to find some new friends, to end the relationship, to turn the TV off, to install accountability software, to memorize a passage of scripture, or to creatively deal with your idle time. We are in a war with sin, and sometimes the battle requires theory and strategy. At other times it requires the movement of forces and firing of bullets. Not every battle is the same. We wage our warfare with indicatives and imperatives. To be an instrument of righteousness, we have to connect our thinking and our doing.

2. You must think biblically (v .11b)

The most important word in verse 11 is “consider.” It is a vital link between the indicatives of the previous chapters and the actions of chapter 6. It connects two phrases: “so you must also” and “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” It highlights our union to Christ, but in a new way.

Romans 6:1-11 was filled with definitive statements about who we are in Christ, and the phrase “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” is the summation of all that we heard and read last week. The same statement is made about Jesus in verse 10: “he died to sin once for all . . . the life he lives he lives to God.” Jesus defeated the power of sin and death through his death and resurrection. But Paul talks about this reality because of its effect on those who are “in Christ.” Something happened when Christ died, and what happened to Him has very important implications for the followers of Jesus. They are “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The Bible tells us that this new reality is, in fact, true.

However, even though it is true, it doesn’t mean that it is automatically lived out practically. Everyone knows this, and it creates a tension because sin still feels very much alive. The struggle with sin is not over, which might lead some to conclude that what the Bible says is not, in fact, true. It says I’m dead to sin, but sin isn’t dead. So the Bible, or at least this truth, doesn’t really work.

That's where the word "consider" comes into play. This Greek word is used forty times in the New Testament and nineteen times in Romans. It is used in Romans 4:3 to describe the way that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness. The word essentially means to calculate and may be used to taking something into account, crediting something to someone, or considering something to be the case.¹ There is a bookkeeping metaphor in mind here. The idea is that there is a reality called your account at the bank, and you know what is in the account by doing the calculation, adding up the credits and debits, or by "doing the math." Adding up the amount does not give you more or less money; it only serves to show you what is already real. But by "doing the math," you can then make decisions based upon that reality. "Considering" your bank account opens your eyes to the facts. It doesn't make it more or less true, but "considering" does effect what you do (or at least it should).

So how do believers in Jesus "consider" the truth of Romans 6? It means that since Christ died to sin, believers should live in light of Christ's victory over the tyranny of sin and its power. To consider means that we believe or have "done the math" about the power of sin over those who are in Christ. It means that we see the world, temptations, our struggles, and the fight for victory in light of the victory of Christ. Followers of Jesus are commanded to think about and believe what is in fact true to them.

Do you "do the math" when it comes to your relationship with Jesus? Let me take you back to the illustration of a bank account. To use a bank account well, you have to understand some basic concepts like addition and subtraction and that spending takes money out. You have to realize that the amount in the bank is real regardless of how you feel. You have to spend time checking what is in your account. And you have to intentionally connect your actions to what is in the account.

Do you understand basic concepts about the cross, atonement, forgiveness and what Christ has done? Do you think about, read about, and meditate on these realities? Do you spend time thinking about what is in your Christ account? Do you live by what you feel to be true, or do you live by what is really true? And do you connect your life to the life of Christ? The right actions in your life are never going to be produced if you do not start with the right thinking.

Freedom comes to those who "do the math" when it comes to who they are in Christ. The whole point of Romans 6 is that sin does not have the same power over you as it did before you came to Christ. God changed something about you, but you have to believe that it is, in fact, true. You have to use your brain and think about it. You have to consider what God did for you in Christ. You have to invest time and energy in understanding the beautiful realities of the Bible. You have to consider what is true and connect your life to it. Thinking biblically means "doing the math" and opening your eyes to what is in fact true. To be an instrument of righteousness, you must think biblically.

¹ Colin Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 266

3. You must take the right actions (vv. 12-14)

Finally, we have arrived at some very specific things that we must do. It is good to be at this point, but we have to keep in mind that Paul intentionally waited until this section of Romans 6 to become very practical. There are no practical steps without the positional realities of the previous chapters. In other words, there is no Romans 6 without Romans 1-5.

Now we are going to look at things to which we are to say “No,” and we are going to look at things to which we should say “Yes.” But before we do that, let me give you a high level overview what Paul is saying here. It seems that he is describing a great conflict, and we could think of it like this:²

- There is a reign or a controlling reality that is being contested – verse 12: “Do not let sin **reign**.”
- There is a challenger or a rebel who wants to take control – verse 12: “Do not let **sin** reign.”
- There is a specific location for this battle – verse 12: “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.”
- There are secret agents called desires behind the lines who work to foment rebellion – verse 12: “Do not let sin reign . . . to make you obey its **passions**.”
- There is a possibility of incremental surrender when a front in the battle is being lost – verse 12: “. . . to make you **obey** its passions.”
- There are weapons (instruments) that can be used for the insurrection – verse 13: “Do not present your members to sin as **instruments** of unrighteousness.”
- There is one true King over the realm, and He is God – verse 13: “But present yourselves to **God** as those who have been brought from death to life . . .”
- There is a new principle of authority in the midst of this insurrection battle – verse 14: “. . . sin will not have dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace.”

Paul is painting a picture here for us regarding a believer’s battle with the power of sin. I found it very helpful to think of it in this framework because it provides a context for understanding what it means to be dead to sin and alive to God, and what it means to live in the beauty of dethroned sin.

Saying “No!” to Sin

Verses 12-13a give us a clear sense that there are something to which we are to say “No!” The first right action in applying Romans 6 is understanding what should be resisted at all costs.

First, notice that there is a potential for sin to have a “reign” in our mortal bodies. I use the word potential because the way that Paul postures his argument here it is clear that sin is not supposed to reign. Sin is a challenger to the rule and reign of God. Sin wants the power that Christ has achieved for those who are His.

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/do-not-let-sin-reign-in-your-mortal-body-part-1>

There is an important mind-set shift that needs to take place here, and I wonder if it has happened for you. The change of thinking and actions is to really and deeply understand that sin is not the governing authority for a believer. Sin doesn't own the town anymore. God does. Sin is now involved in an insurrection where it is trying to overthrow the rule and reign of God.

Every day, in the lives of kingdom-minded believers, a battle is playing out between the forces of good and evil. The devil is attempting to replay his rebellion and the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden. He wants to spoil everything that reflects the goodness and grace of God. And Paul commands us here to both see sin for what is and to not let sin express itself in the body. You see, sin is not just an idea or a theory. It is real, and it expresses itself in the control of the body. So Paul says, "Don't let it win in your body."

But he also adds: "to make it obey its passions." He is telling us to watch out for our desires, our passions, or our feelings. You see, the enemy is so good at using God-given desires and turning them so that they become secret tunnels for the forces of evil to enter our lives. The desire for food, drink, rest, approval, sex, success, and countless others are not, in themselves, bad. But they can become bad, and when they become distorted, self-centered, and anti-god, these traitor-desires take control of parts of the body. A person who gives into the wrong desires and acts upon them has given a band of insurrectionists a place to live.

What's more, according to verse 13, the actual members of our body can be used as instruments of unrighteousness. The word translated as "instrument" often means weapon in the Bible (see John 18:3, 2 Cor. 6:7, 10:4). So we are not talking about cooking instruments. The idea is that the enemy gets ahold of the arsenal of God, and he turns it against God in his battle of insurrection. Now Paul has become very specific here, and I think you and I need to think of it very specifically. The command here is not to use our brains, our mouths, our eyes, our hands, our sexual organs, or any part of us for sin's insurrection. When we do, we are using God's weapons of righteousness as weapons against Him. Your members are more than just physical parts of your body. They could actually become part of the cosmic insurrection against God.

The next time you start to do what you, as a follower of Jesus, know you should not do, ask yourself: "Hey! What are we doing?!" Sin loves to deceive by downplaying, minimizing or excusing. You need to see sin for what it really is. Remind yourself that these deceitful desires are dangerous, and if they are attached to a part of your body, they could control part, or even all, of you. And in doing so, you become part of the insurrection. So say "No!" to sin's rule through passions expressed in parts of your body.

Say "Yes!" to God

As is so often the case, the Bible does not stop with no. In fact, the power of "No!" is in a stronger "Yes!" and the first "Yes" involves the believer offering him or herself to God. The idea here is to

place yourself at God's disposal.³ This is the same concept and Greek word as we will find in Romans 12:1 where believers are to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices. Believers are to offer themselves in a general or total sense, but they are also to offer their individual members to God as well. So the rule of God is to be total and very specific.

But notice what follows the general and specific appeals. We are to present ourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. We need to live very practically in the reality of what Christ has done for us. We need to see ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God. But we also need to see our members as the instruments of righteousness. We need to see our brains, mouths, eyes, hands, and sexual organs not as the helpless tools of evil but as weapons in the service of the living God.⁴ You see, every time you connect your identity to Christ and connect the members of your body to righteousness, you are making a glorious and powerful statement about the supremacy of God, the power of the gospel, and victory in Jesus. Sanctification happens as you repeatedly and progressively decide that you agree with what the Bible says about you and as you use every part of yourself for the service of the real King.

It also means that you are living under the new and beautiful dominion of grace, and that is what verses 14 introduces, and what we will cover in two weeks when we connect Romans 6:15-23 to our lives and the cause of Global missions.

Finally, then, could I ask you to think about one thing? What is the one sin that needs to be targeted in your life today? Do you see how giving in to that sin is participating in the devil-inspired insurrection? What truths about who you are in Christ do you need to rehearse today? What indicatives do you need to meditate upon, memorize, or apply to your life? And what specific actions do you need to take so that certain parts of your body are no longer able to be used by the enemy?

Romans 6 does not call us to sinless perfectionism. But it does call us to fight aggressively, and to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Sin, while still dwelling in the believer, is no longer in charge. Sin may be present, but it is not in power.

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³ Kruse, 269

⁴ Ibid