

Overcoming Sin

Memory Text: “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)

Setting The Stage: The idea of living a victorious Christian life is clearly promised over and over again the Bible. It’s without a doubt that God wants us to know that sin does not have to reign in our lives, but that we, by and through God’s grace, can overcome it.

1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Jude 24: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,”

Hebrews 7:25: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Romans 8:37: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

Revelation 3:21: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

How is this victory attained? How can we overcome sin? We must keep in mind what General Dwight Eisenhower once said when seeking an answer to these questions: “*There are no victories at discount prices.*” In other words, there is a cost if we would live victoriously for Christ. But what is that cost?

Sunday – Where Sin Abounded

Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:22, 23

Romans 6:1-11. Paul has spoken of the universal degeneracy of humanity resulting from Adam’s fall. But he has assured us that despite our inherent and cultivated tendencies to sin, the grace of God is more than sufficient to save us from our sin, to turn sin into righteousness and death into eternal life. The more sin has abounded, the more grace has abounded (Rom. 5:20). Does this then imply that we might as well go on living our lives of sin so that grace might abound even more?

It's a question Paul needs to answer seeing there were those who believed that justification by faith apart from the works of the law gave license to continue to sin – a belief that betrayed their failure to realize God's purpose to restore humanity. So Paul proceeds to explain the genuine experience of justification, namely sanctification.

What is the one thought that Paul continues to come back to in these verses that point to a key ingredient to a life of victory? Romans 6:2 (“died to sin”), v.3 (“baptized into His death”), v.4 (we were buried with Him”), v.5 (“united together in the likeness of His death”), v.6 (“old man was crucified with Him”), v.7 (“he who has died”), v.8 (“if we died with Christ”), v.11 (“reckon yourselves to be dead”).

“Dead to sin.” (v. 2) Paul's point is that to live in sin is inconsistent with having once died to it at the time of the believer's new birth and justification. To live in sin means that sin is the element in which we live, the moral atmosphere that our souls breathe. The evidence that a person is justified, born again, and passed from death to life is that he/she now finds joy in obeying God.

“In the new birth the heart is brought into harmony with God, as it is brought into accord with His law. When this mighty change has taken place in the sinner, he has passed from death unto life, from sin unto holiness, from transgression and rebellion to obedience and loyalty. The old life of alienation from God has ended; the new life of reconciliation, of faith and love, has begun. Then ‘the righteousness of the law’ will ‘be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:4. And the language of the soul will be: ‘O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.’ Psalm 119:97” (The Great Controversy, p. 468)

It is true that the believer may fall at times (1 John 2:1), but the evidence that a person has really been born of God is that he/she no longer continues practicing sin (“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” 1 John 3:9), or as Paul describes it, he no longer lives in sin.

“Into His death.” (v. 3, 4) Compare vv. 10, 11. As Christ died to sin, so the Christian should regard himself as dead to sin. And if by baptism the believer has shown his participation in Christ's death unto sin in his behalf, then surely he can't continue living in the sin that made that death necessary.

“Was raised.” (v. 4) It's vital to know that baptism doesn't just symbolize death and burial but also resurrection. The rite points in two directions – back to our death to sin and forward to our new life in Christ. As the death of Christ had the resurrection view, so also the work of grace doesn't end with the believer's death to sin. It also looks forward to a higher, holier, brighter life. Justification anticipates the Christian's sanctification.

What does Paul mean by “old man”? The Greek term translated by these words in Rom. 6:6 appears also in Col. 3:9 and Eph. 4:22. In these texts the old man can also be stated as the old nature.

Colossians 3:9: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”

Ephesians 4:22, 23: “That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

This gives us a clearer understanding as to what constitutes our old man. The old man talks to our former manner of life, which involves the attitude of our mind or desires of the heart. Paul talks about the unconverted mind (Rom. 8:7).

The old man refers to the mind, or heart, whose tastes, affections, emotions, imaginations, desires, attitudes, will, motives and ambitions are set along the line of sin. It is the condition in which self reigns; the self-centered life in which the person does their own thing. It is the position in which the unconverted person finds himself in.

“Done away with.” (v. 6) The “body of sin” Paul refers to isn’t our physical bodies of flesh, blood, and bone, which in itself is morally inert – not sinful. He’s referring to the sinful desires of the body and mind (see Eph. 2:3), those senses and faculties of the body of which sin has taken possession and which has been conditioned to sin by inherited tendencies and habits of sin.

Being born again, those things have now been rendered powerless, neutralized, put out of commission, devitalized. So Paul is not saying that the old tastes, emotions, desires, etc. are totally eliminated. He is saying they no longer have the power to manipulate the person. Praise God for that!

Monday – When Sin Reigns

Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 15:31

Romans 6:12. Choice and decision are important components in our being dead to sin and alive to Christ. You can see this in the words “reckon” (v. 11), and now “do not *let* sin reign.” This isn’t mind over matter, but faith in God’s ability to aid us.

Paul has already talked about the universality of death’s reign (Rom. 5:14, 17) due to the reality of sin, and the provision of life brought about through Christ’s death and resurrection (v. 17). Now, as if to make salvation a very personal matter, he encourages us with the idea of sin not needing to reign in our lives; not having dominion over us because we are dead to sin and alive to Christ. In other words, sin can be, must be deposed (removed from office).

If we are dead to sin, how is that we might still be allured by it? It's very simple. We are dead to sin, but sin is not yet dead. Although the "old man" has been crucified, we are still in our "mortal bodies" with its earthly desires and cravings. Sin is still a power. If we allow, sin may have dominion over us. As surprising as it is to some, being born again doesn't necessarily eradicate the desires of the flesh. The experience, however, places us in touch with a power by which we may successfully resist the attempted domination of sin.

It is for this reason that with Paul, we must do something he wrote about:

1 Corinthians 15:31: "I die daily." Our experience yesterday isn't sufficient for today. Though we may have died to sin yesterday, our "old man" may rear its ugly head again today. Only as we "reckon ourselves dead to sin" and are alive to Christ, can we topple the reign of sin in the life. Martin Luther put it this way: "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair"

Tuesday – Not Under The Law But Under Grace

Romans 6:14, 15

Romans 6:14, 15. It's true that sin will tempt and annoy, but it doesn't have mastery over the born again Christian. Therefore, we can yield ourselves with courage to God's service because victory over sin is promised!

The point is Christians are not under law as a way of salvation, but under grace. The law can't save a sinner, nor can law put an end to sin or its dominion. Actually, because of the sinfulness of mankind, the law causes transgression to increase (Rom. 5:20). Like a mirror, whose sole purpose is to point out dirt on the face not cleanse the face of the dirt or prevent a person from getting dirty again, law cannot cleanse sin or provide any power to overcome it. But those who are under grace receive not only release from condemnation, but also power to overcome (see Rom. 4:13, 17).

Wednesday – Sin Or Obedience

Romans 6:16-18; John 8:34; 2 Peter 2:19

Romans 6:16-18. Paul illustrates his answer to the question raised on v. 15 by referring to the custom of slavery at his time, with which his readers would have been familiar. Among the Greeks and Romans a slave was regarded as his master's property, and his master could dispose of him as he pleased. Under a cruel master the lot of the slave could be severely oppressive and he was sometimes treated worse than a beast. This is the condition of every miserable sinner. He is a slave of Satan, and his own evil desires and appetites are his relentless taskmasters.

2 Peter 2:19: “For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”

John 8:34: “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’ ”

Does this mean that when a Christian accidentally stumps his toe that he becomes a slave to sin? Because a sincere Christian will recognize her wrong, confess and repent of that wrong, and ask God to help him overcome that past formed habit, they are not slaves to sin. If she didn’t seek repentance and faith to overcome that wrong, then they give evidence that they are the servants of sin because they are not seeking mastery over it.

Paul uses the same word “slave” to describe the servants of Christ. By this he makes it clear that they are certainly Christ’s property. But since Christ is infinitely good and benevolent, His service is actually perfect freedom, for He requires no obedience that He does not turn to the eternal advantage of His servants.

Thursday – Free From Sin

Romans 6:19-23

Romans 6:19-23. Paul evidently felt that the figures of slavery and bondage were unworthy to describe the relation of a Christian to his Master, for they suggest a forced, mechanical service. But he chose this illustration from common life out of consideration for a lack of spiritual discernment on the part of the believers.

“Holiness.” Sanctification is the continuous process of consecration. It’s the harmonious development day by day of the physical, mental, and spiritual powers, until the image of God. In which we were originally created, is restored in us. God’s purpose in the plan of salvation is not only our forgiveness, or justification, but our restoration, or sanctification.

1 Thessalonians 4:3: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;”

1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Set free from sin.” Once we were enslaved and in bondage to sin. Sin had dominion over us. But now, having died to sin and been made alive to Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are no longer under the bondage and dominion of sin. We are free. And with freedom comes responsibility. We are not free to do as we please, but we are free to serve God with full devotion, without worry, guilt, or fear.