

BE STEADFAST IN FIGHTING SIN
ROMANS 6:12-14

On a very limited number of occasions — once, maybe twice — I have felt like I had reached the limits of my physical ability. My arms and legs trembling with weariness, I was near the end of my body’s strength.

On a few of occasions I’ve watched sporting events and seen athletes expend themselves to such a limit that they had to be carried off the field by their teammates. They had not suffered an injury; their exhaustion simply prevented them from physically continuing their activity.

Numerous times I’ve stood at a bedside and seen someone at the end of life — his or her body failing from weariness and the cumulative effect of a lifetime of ills and weaknesses bringing them to their final breath.

All these manifestations of weariness, and more, are not uncommon experiences to us.

But there is another kind of weariness as well — a *spiritual* weariness that tempts one to say, “I quit — I’ve done all that I can do. I can’t do it any longer. I’m too tired and the attraction of sin is too strong.” Of all the dangers of spiritual weariness, this is the greatest danger — the danger of not warring against sin.

In his book *Comrades*, historian Stephen Ambrose writes about the nature of war:

Combat requires all the nerves, all the physical attributes, every bit of the training. It is only in combat, nowhere else, where time is measured in other ways than by clocks or calendars. Only in combat does the soldier realize that he is in the worst situation that can ever be imagined, that nothing else can compare to it, that the longer he stays where he is the more likely that he will be dead, or if he is extremely lucky he will be wounded. Only in combat is one in a position in which youngsters his age he doesn’t know, has never met, are trying to kill him — and he is trying to kill them. [109]

While Ambrose was writing of physical war, his description is a fitting analogy for the spiritual life. The spiritual life is war. Our spiritual battle has infinitely more costly implications for victory and loss than physical war. And the enemy we battle is far more devious than any worldly commander. And the General we serve is far greater in equipping us than any earthly general.

If we will succeed in the spiritual battles we face, we will need to assume the mindset that we are not on vacation, but that we are in a succession of battles against sin. We are not fighting to save our souls (only God can save us, which is what Romans 4 is all about), but we *are* in a battle to live the salvation that God has granted to us. And that is Paul’s point in **Romans 6:12-14** — because we were identified with Christ’s death and resurrection when we were justified, we must therefore “not let sin reign” over us (v. 12).

Sin is *not* our master, and because sin is not our master, we should not live in a way that makes it appear as if sin is our master. That is our battle. And it is a battle we must be steadfast to fight.

Now Paul does not use words like “be steadfast” or “endure” in this section, but he does use words like “consider” and “do not let sin reign” and “do not present yourselves to sin” in the present tense. And that tense indicates the same meaning as “be steadfast” — he is compelling our ongoing, steadfast, unwavering battle against sin.

As we come to these important verses we summarize the theme of this passage this way:

BECAUSE WE ARE UNITED TO CHRIST, BE STEADFAST TO FIGHT AGAINST SIN.

We are in a battle against sin, how will we fight that battle? We will fight the battle by living out **four implications** of our union with Christ.

- 1. Be Steadfast Not Let Sin RULE Your Life (v. 12)**
- 2. Be Steadfast Not Use Your Life in Unrighteous SERVICE (v. 13a)**
- 3. Be Steadfast to Use Your Life to SERVE God (v. 13b)**
- 4. Be Steadfast Because You WILL Master Sin... (v. 14)**

1. Be Steadfast to Not Let Sin RULE Your Life (v. 12)

- In verse 11, Paul gave a command for the first time in this letter (he adds two more in vv. 12-13). The believer is to **consider** himself both dead and alive. He is *dead* to sin (crucified with Christ, resurrected with Christ, no longer dead in his sins, and no longer under sin's mastery). And he is *alive* to Christ (like Christ, now able to live for the glory of God, v. 10). But there are further implications of that command; and Paul indicates those implications with the word **therefore** (v. 12).
- In v. 3 Paul explained our union with Christ; and because of our position in Christ, certain things should take place in our lives.
- And the first thing that should take place in our lives is a negative command — **do not...**
 - ✓ Specifically, he says, **do not let sin reign**. The word **reign** ("king") is common in this passage (cf. 5:14, 17, 21). So death and sin *did* reign prior to justification, but now in Christ, their sovereignty is removed (similar to the removal of Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty, Dan. 4).
 - ✓ Paul's point is that sin should be deposed as ruler in the believer's life (and should not be a perpetual indulgence, v. 1). *Sin is not our king. Christ is King.*
 - ✓ "Self-indulgence is inconsistent with trust in the vicarious atonement." [Robertson]
- But notice also that with this command there is also an implied assumption that sin still exists in the life of the believer. As one writer says, "...believers do not have a serene existence from which sin has been blissfully excluded. They are still 'in the flesh' as well as 'in Christ'. Sin is still a force, but Paul's point is that it is not supreme." [Morris]
 - ✓ So sin exists and the believer is not exempt from temptations and attractions to sin.
 - ✓ But now sin is a choice, and sin *does not* have to be obeyed. It exists, but it is not king. What John Murray [*Romans*] says on this topic is so helpful:

"It is only because sin does not reign that it can be said, 'Therefore do not let sin reign.' In other words, ... [sin] does not reign....To say to the slave who has not been emancipated, 'Do not behave as a slave' is to mock his enslavement. But to say the same to the slave who has been set free is the necessary appeal to put into effect the privileges and rights of his liberation. So in this case the sequence is: sin does not have the dominion; therefore do not allow it to reign." [Murray, 227.]

- ✓ So sin still exists for every believer and will be a life-long battle, but the confidence is that we aren't under its control and dominion.

- Now Paul emphasizes that sin shouldn't reign in our **mortal body**. What does he mean?
 - ✓ The fact that he refers to the **mortality** of the body seems to indicate that he's talking about our fleshly bodies. But he also talks about the **members** of the body (v. 13) as part of the physical **body**. So he is talking about our bodies as a totality as well as each individual part.
 - ✓ And then he says in 13b, **present yourselves...your members...** The pronoun, "yourselves," means something more than just bodily function. He is talking about everything that makes up our being — our physical bodies and our immaterial thoughts and desires.
 - ✓ Notice also the summary (purpose) phrase in this verse (v. 12) — **so that you obey its lusts**. While occasionally the word **lusts** is used for righteous longings (Phil. 1:23) here Paul is using it with the typical negative connotation (Rom. 1:24; 7:7-8). Paul's point is that the yearnings (desires) of the body are not neutral and they never will tend toward Christlikeness and ultimate satisfaction. We should not obey and submit to those desires.
 - ✓ So when Paul says **mortal body**, he means that our physical bodies should not be used to indulge sin; but he also means that *nothing in our lives* (including our desires and thoughts) should be a conduit for sinful behavior. He wants us to battle against sin both inwardly and outwardly.

- Paul has said, "don't let sin be king in your life." Fine. But the question is, *how* does the believer *dethrone* sin in his life? While Paul isn't explicit here, there are some implications from what he says:
 - ✓ **Sin is a choice that we make**. It is not something that "happens to us." It is an act of the will. And it can be acted against. We do not have to do it (which means that when we sin, we are doing *exactly* what we want in that moment). So if sin is a choice that we make, we have to decide ahead of time what we will do when tempted.
 - Decades ago I learned the term, "Pre-decide" — *before* you get into a situation where you will be tempted, decide what you will do. Decide what links you will click before they are offered to you; decide how much money you will spend before you go to the store; decide how much food you will eat before you get to the table; decide what you will say before you enter a difficult conversation; decide how you will serve before you arrive at home.
 - This means have a plan of attack against sin before it comes calling. Be intentional, purposeful, and decisive to fight against sin. We will never win the battle against sin until we recognize that we are in a battle and that we *can* and *must* act against sin.
 - We might summarize this as, "stop making plans to sin and start planning for righteousness" (13:14).
 - ✓ **Because sin is a "whole bodied" response to temptation**, we need to engage our whole body in the response. By that I mean two things:
 - *We command our body to not do certain things*: we tell our mouths not to speak a critical, sarcastic, or angry word and our feet not to take us to a place where we will covet and our eyes not to look at immoral images and words.

- *We think so our desires are changed* — and we must control and order and direct our desires and longings. The fight against sin is about far more than just not going to particular places: it is about changing the way we think and changing what we want. You might want to memorize this statement: we do what we do because we *want what we want*. And if we want to stop doing what we do? Then we must change what we want.
 - That God gave this command not to let sin reign is an encouragement that He has given us what we need to win this battle. It is true that we can't remove every sin from our lives; but we *can* grow in Christlikeness and we *can* remove sin's kingship over our lives.
- The first way to fight against sin is to refuse to let it be our master. And the second way is...

2. Be Steadfast to Not Use Your Life in Unrighteous SERVICE (v. 13a)

- In v. 13, Paul gives a parallel exhortation to the one he gave in v. 12 — ***do not go on presenting...***
 - ✓ The word “present” has the idea of putting oneself at another’s disposal or use. Or, offering oneself in service of another. And since Paul uses the present tense, he is talking about a habitual lifestyle (Paul is again resisting the idea offered in v. 1).
 - ✓ And the present tense reminds us also that this is a constant and regular battle every day (and throughout every day) for every believer. It is not unusual when you are tempted to sin; but the believer should not perpetually use his body (and life) in service of sinful desires.
- Notice what else Paul says:
 - ✓ He mentions not our ***mortal bodies***, but the ***members of your body***. By mentioning the ***members*** he implies that no member (part) of our body should be used in serving sin. But this is also an example of a figure of speech called synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole. So Paul means, “no aspect of the person should be used in serving sin.”
 - ✓ And just by way of reminder, ***sin*** is not just “missing the mark,” like an archer shooting at a target, but it is an act of rebellion that refuses to submit to the authority of God’s standard. Our lives should never be used to embrace rebellion against God (because we were made His friends, 5:8-10, and sons, 8:15-17).
 - ✓ When Paul talks about ***instruments of unrighteousness***, he means *weapons* of unrighteousness. So just as a soldier has weapons he uses in battle (e.g., Jn. 18:3; 2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4), so a sinner uses weapons to accomplish his sin.
 - ✓ This is Paul’s way to remind us that we are in a battle. Having been redeemed from sin and moved from the domain of death and Satan to the kingdom of Christ and life, we are no longer to fight the battle *for sin and against Christ* by using our lives as weapons against God.
 - ✓ There is no good time or place for the believer to use his body for unrighteousness. (We might even ask ourselves when tempted, “Is this a good time to be unrighteous and rebellious?”)

- ✓ For the believer to practice unrighteousness is to not only misuse his body, but it is to be opposed to God Himself, because God not only does righteousness, but He *is* righteous.
- ✓ So to be unrighteous and to delight in unrighteousness is to delight in that which God hates and to delight in everything that God is not. There is never a good time to do unrighteousness.
- An old children’s song is helpful; it is a simple and helpful reminder that we are not to use our bodies in the service of sin:

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|---|---|
| O be careful little eyes what you see... | O be careful little mouth what you say... |
| O be careful little ears what you hear... | There’s a Father up above |
| O be careful little hands what you do... | And He’s looking down in love |
| O be careful little feet where you go... | So, be careful little mouth what you say |

- O may we be intentional and purposeful in how we use our lives; may we fight against sin and its attractions with all the resources the Lord has given us. And one of the great resources is given in the next part of this verse...

3. Be Steadfast to Use Your Life to SERVE God (v. 13b)

- In contrast to using our bodies to serve sin, we are to use them in service of God (Paul’s very statement in the well-known transitional verse in this book, 12:1).
- ✓ Notice that Paul again uses an imperative (command) with the Romans — **present yourselves**. That is, offer your entire life (**yourself**) in service of another. And because this is a command, Paul means that it is something we *can* do and it is something that is a matter of the will.
- ✓ And notice that Paul says that we are to present ourselves **to God**. In the previous phrase he says we are not to present ourselves **to sin**. So in case we are particularly blind and hard-headed, he sets **sin** and **God** in direct contrast with one another: to serve the one precludes us from serving the other. And here that is good news — if we are serving the Lord we will not be serving sin. Either sin will be attractive because Christ is not, or Christ will be attractive because sin is not.
- ✓ And why would we serve God? Because we are **those [who are] alive from the dead**. In other words, to be alive to God means to recognize that you *were* dead, but now you are alive in Christ, because of the life of Christ. We are no more dead than Christ is dead; but the dead life we had been living *is* now dead and we are enabled through the power of Christ to do acts of righteousness that are pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9, 14-15, 17).
- One of the primary ways to fight against sin is to serve God. Instead of indulging the flesh and sinful desires, replace those ungodly actions with righteous actions. When we talk about sanctification, we often simplify this to the short statement, “Put off — put on” (Eph. 4:22, 24). It is stopping our sinful behavior and *replacing* it with corresponding acts of righteousness. In Eph. 4:25ff, Paul says —

- ✓ Instead of being angry and hostile towards others, we are quick to reconcile and confess.
- ✓ Instead of tearing others down with critical words, we use our words to build up others.
- ✓ Instead of stealing from others, we work hard so that we can give to others.
- ✓ Instead of pridefully waiting for others to serve us, we humbly and quickly serve others.
- ✓ Instead of greedily using all our resources for ourselves by acquiring and hoarding things, we give away what we have for the benefit of others.
- ✓ This is the kind of thing that Paul means here: don't use your life to serve sin (put off), but use your life to serve God (put on).
- ✓ And remember that the word **instruments** is warfare language — we are in a battle against sin; are we living our lives with a “warrior” mentality, putting on the armor of truth and righteousness and the peace-producing gospel, and faith, and salvation, and God's Word (Eph. 6)? Are we actively battling against sin and temptation and for righteousness and truth (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 2 Cor. 10:4-5)?
- ✓ We are in a war, and we must fight to be righteous (which also means that it won't always be easy and it will never be effortless, but it will always be satisfying to fight).
- ✓ Remember: *No one accidentally slides into righteousness.* We grow into righteousness through the justifying and sanctifying work of God and then by applying with diligence and persistence what God has given to us to be righteous. *Do* use your life in service of God.
- ✓ And why should we work hard against sin and for righteousness? Because of God's promise...

4. Be Steadfast Because You WILL Master Sin... (v. 14)

- When we talk about sanctification (particularly from Eph. 4:22-24), we simplify it by saying, “Put off — Put on,” but that simple statement overlooks a key component to sanctification. It overlooks Eph. 4:23 — to be sanctified, the mind must be renewed. We must think a new way. Simply said, the battle for righteousness is a battle for the mind. And Paul also provides us with a mind renewal principle in this passage — something new to think. The fight against sin is not fought only by resisting sin and serving God; the fight is fought by thinking a new way: we engage in this fight because God has made a promise: ***sin shall not be master over you.***
 - ✓ The verb **master** is the same one used in v. 9 and it is in the same word group as the word **Lord**. So it means “to be lord over and to rule over.”
 - ✓ This is a promise. Because you are a believer, sin will not be your master (even in this life) because it is not master over Christ (v. 9). The believer experiences a change of lordship when he becomes a believer. We can be bold in our fight against sin knowing that sin is not master over us.
 - ✓ Sometimes it *feels* like sin is master; sometimes it *feels* like we are powerless against sin and that we will and even must fail in our battle. But this is a good reminder: if Christ is our Lord, sin is *not* our lord (no man can serve two masters, Mt. 6:24).

- ✓ It is essential to note that this does not mean that there will be no battle against sin. There will be temptation, and the believer will still sin, but sin no longer is a legal master or lord over him.
 - Because we are in the battle, we will often think about how to fight against the sin. (If we are fighting well, we will think more about sin than when we are not fighting against sin!) And it may feel as if we have lost the battle because we are fighting it so much. But fighting against the temptation is very different than giving into the temptation.
 - There is a difference between sin's rulership and a constant battle against that sin with some periodic "losses" to that sin. *One loss does not mean that sin is master.* When we are talking about mastery and lordship of sin, we are talking about a perpetual and willful engagement of sin and a rebellion against God's law and an unwillingness to repent and turn away from sin. There is a massive difference between the one who fights against sin and sometimes fails and then repents and the one who willfully (and even joyfully) embraces his sin as a pattern and lifestyle (6:1; 1 Jn. 3:4-6). If you are in Christ, take confidence in the fact that sin will not be your master. Christ is your Lord; sin is not your lord.
 - We must also acknowledge that because the believer does not have sin as his lord, if you are experiencing a lifestyle of unrepentant, willful sin, it is because you likely are not in Christ. We can say that because God tells us in this verse that sin will not be the master of the believer. So if sin is your master, then the likeliest option is that you are not in Christ — you are not a Christian. But friend, there is a sense in which that is good news, because you can repent of unbelief and you can trust Christ, and He can and will save you if you trust in Him. This was the condition of all of us, and when we repented and believed, He saved. So if your life is about indulging yourself in sin, I call you to confess and repent of that sin and trust that Christ's death is sufficient to save you and make you a follower of Him. Christ alone is sufficient and necessary to save us (3:24-25). And you will be saved through faith alone in Him (3:26).
- How can Paul say that sin will not be our master? Because ***you are not under law but under grace.***
 - ✓ What does it mean to be ***under law***? It means the condemning law is "over" a person as authority:
 - The Law brings knowledge of sin (3:20).
 - The Law, through the knowledge of sin, leads to an increase in the severity of sin (5:20; 7:8-9)
 - The Law produces condemnation (Gal. 3:10)
 - The Law brings wrath (4:15).
 - So the Law cannot save and the Law cannot empower the believer to overcome sin. "To be 'under law' is to be subject to the constraining and sin-threatening regime of the old age." [Moo] The law does not liberate from sin; it only "accentuates and confirms that bondage." [Murray]

- ✓ What does it mean to be ***under grace***? To be under grace goes back to **5:18-21** — to be under grace is to have grace as our authority (Master) — be justified (vv. 18-19), forgiven and cleansed (v. 20), and freed from sin's power and under the domination of God's transforming power (v. 21).
- ✓ So when we are under grace, we have been freed from sin and we don't have to sin. By definition, when we are saved, sin and death are removed as masters and Christ is our new master. Now we don't have to obey sin and now we can obey Him. That's what it means to be under grace. And that's why Paul can say, ***sin will not be your master***. You are free from that mastery.
- ✓ And to say that sin *will not* be your master also anticipates the final day of the believer — his forever day of victory in Glory when all sin and sinful desires are removed (**8:30**; 1 Jn. 3:1ff).
- ✓ We are steadfast in our fight against sin because that is the destination for which we have been regenerated into new creatures by the death and resurrection of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

Many years ago I received an email from a friend from seminary who had served a church as pastor for 20 years. His note contained this sentence: "I would appreciate your prayers as [my wife] and I recently separated. I left [the church] in January...I wish I could say it looked hopeful but **I gave up** and fell and that's hard to recover from."

There's a lot of exposed functional theology in that sentence, but one thing is right — his sin wasn't accidental. He gave up. He wavered when he should have been steadfast, He quit walking with Christ and being obedient to Him.

Friends, you and I are in a war. But it is a hopeful war. In our war against sin, our Master has decisively and completely overcome and overwhelmed the enemy. So when we are in Him, our enemy is no longer our master and we are no longer obligated to do the bidding of that enemy.

But the enemy is still attacking so we *must* fight against that enemy. The fight *is* hard and long. But our Master has won the battle for us. So don't quit. **Be steadfast** and unwavering in the fight because God has given us exactly what we need so that we *can* fight against the enemy of sin and experience victory.

BENEDICTION (David L): **Jude 24-25.**