

Whereas 6:1-11 primarily provide instruction regarding the *reality* of the believer's death to sin and new life in Christ, verses 6:12-23 focus more upon the proper *response* to these truths. Thus this context presents a series of imperatives (exhortations) informing the believer's practical approach to his sanctification. At the same time, Paul was careful to repeatedly qualify his exhortations by reminding his readers that their pursuit of holiness was to be informed and empowered by the reality of their new status of being "in Christ."

This relationship between the indicative (what is true) and the imperative (what ought to be done) is everywhere present, not only in Paul's letters, but also throughout the New Testament. Indeed, a careful reading of the Old Testament reveals exactly the same structure: Israel's obligation of obedience was to be understood by the nation as nothing more than the authentic living out of its identity as God's elect, beloved covenant son and bride. So it is with the New Covenant believer: his practical sanctification is simply the life of his justification. Any other perspective on the pursuit of holiness - however sincere or devout - leads inexorably to moralism, which in turn yields one of two "fruits": either the delusion of self-righteousness or the despair of personal incapacity.

Paul, the quintessential Pharisee, knew this well, and recognized the bondage of law from which Christ had delivered him. For this reason, it was not until he had meticulously and thoroughly laid the foundation of gospel realities and the significance of being "in Christ" that he began to issue practical directives to his Roman readers. And when he did, the very first thing he commanded them was to *reckon as personally true* all that he had previously disclosed concerning Christ and the power and effect of His work (6:11).

8. In this way Paul established *repentance* as the first and foremost obligation of the Christian. The life of sanctification begins, advances, and reaches its consummation in the context of the believer renouncing his unbelief and governing his thinking according to the truth as it is in Christ. Having come to grasp the significance of the gospel truth of "Christ crucified," and having been joined to Jesus in faith, he is to reckon *himself* "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." And as one raised to newness of life (6:4), the Christian is to fix his affections and pursuits on things above, having the conscious conviction that he died and his life is now hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-4).

But as the biblical life of sanctification is founded upon and grounded in confident faith of the truth and a "hope against hope," so it expresses itself in practical godliness. For the one who *believes* that he has died to the mastery of sin will *live* accordingly; his life will be characterized by the *obedience of faith* to which he was called by the gospel (ref. 1:1-5 and 16:25-27 by which Paul "bookends" the Roman epistle). The Christian life is the life of the gospel, as Mark Seifrid insightfully observes: "*Paul understands the entirety of his ministry to his congregations, and not merely initial evangelization, as a ministry of the gospel. His instruction and admonition are a dimension of his gospel without which his gospel is truncated, and vice versa...In all his letters, whether in narrower or broader context, his exhortation is invariably based upon the announcement of the salvation which God has worked in Christ. In short, where imperatives appear in Paul's letters, they appear in the form of gospel, in which the law has been taken up and transcended.*" (Christ, Our Righteousness, emphasis added)

Thus Paul advanced in verses 6:12-13 from the matter of the believer's *repentance* and *faith* - which is to say, his conviction regarding the truth of and his personal participation in Christ crucified and raised - to that of the personal *practice* that flows out of it

“Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

This exhortation actually consists of four distinct directives correlated in parallel fashion:

- The first two are negative, and the second two are positive. The former express what the believer is to *depart from* (6:12-13a), whereas the latter what he is to *strive toward* (6:13b-13c).
- As well, the first and second exhortations are related to one another in that they move from the more *general* (the whole person) to the *particular* (his members).
- This same general-to-particular structure is then reproduced in the second pair of exhortations, with the result that the first and third exhortations correspond to one another, as do the second and fourth.

A final structural observation is that the first directive introduces the principle of *dominion*, and the next three address the implication of dominion, namely the obligation of the one under authority to *present himself* as the devoted servant of his “lord.”

- a. The first thing to note is Paul's introduction of his four-fold exhortation with the inferential conjunction translated *therefore*. What this indicates is that his practical directives in 6:12-13 presuppose his instruction in 6:1-11, and most particularly the exhortation of verse 6:11. Again, the Christian *must* understand and approach his sanctification from the perspective and belief of his being “in Christ,” with all that reality implies and entails. Seifrid is exactly right: *everywhere in his writing Paul's imperatives are gospel.*

Having come to grasp the objective realities associated with Christ crucified and resurrected, the believer is to reckon those realities as true of himself. That reckoning, in turn, is to be the basis and framework for the life he lives.

- b. Paul's first exhortation is both negative and general: *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts*. As observed previously, this directive introduces the principle of dominion with respect to sin's operation. This will become thematic in the following context (ref. 6:16-22). Fallen men do not simply engage in sinful practices, nor does sin merely wage a constant assault against them; they are *enslaved* by it (cf. John 8:34). Such an insistence may appear to be hyperbole to those who define sin in terms of bad actions, but when sin is properly understood as self-idolatry, men's enslavement to it is indisputable.

Every human being, however moral, ethical, religious, philanthropic, etc., is enslaved to sin for the simple reason that he is enslaved to a comprehensive and determinative preoccupation with himself, and the worship and service of self are the very definition of sin (ref. 1:18-2:29). All that he thinks, does, and says proceeds from the vantage point of *self*, so that even all of his service to others finds its point of reference in himself. In the end, every expression of human existence is calculated - whether consciously or not - to provide some form of personal benefit. Both the Scripture and experience show this to be true.

Thus Paul's first exhortation is a call to *leave off* the former practice of living under sin's (self's) reign. His grammar expresses a prohibition against what is presently occurring, is customary, or is a tendency. Here it would be improper to conclude that Paul was indicating that the Romans were at that time still in subjugation to sin's reign (cf. 6:3-4, 14, 17-18). Rather, the context indicates that Paul was urging them to not give sway to the tendency to yield themselves to sin. For, although sin's ultimate dominion has been broken, it is still operative and threatening to the believer. For this reason it is entirely appropriate for Paul to urge the saints at Rome to not yield to its attempts to reestablish its reign.

At the same time, his directive was not a call to stop committing immoral acts or unethical practices *per se*, but a call to stop living as if self were still "god." By virtue of his death with Christ, the believer has "died" to the former principles that defined him as a person. His old master no longer has any claim upon him; he has been freed to serve another master.

Even more, *he has been joined fully and forever to a new master*, and the obvious implication is that it is impossible for him to continue to serve the former one; no one can serve two masters at the same time. If a person has died with Christ, he has died to sin's former dominion. But this death with Christ also brings with it a new life with Christ. The believer has been raised with Him, so that, just as Christ now lives *to God*, so does the one united with Him (6:10-11). He no longer lives as the servant of sin (self), but as the servant of God in Christ; he has been delivered from his former master to serve a new one.

As already noted, this first exhortation is general in that it is concerned with the *mortal body*. However, by the use of this language Paul was not referring specifically to the physical body, but was implicating the present life the believer lives in the context of his unredeemed mortality (cf. the parallel exhortation in 6:13b). Though he has been raised to newness of life, the Christian yet remains in his mortal body, which awaits its own resurrection to everlasting perfection (ref. 8:12-25; also 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:4; Philippians 3:17-21).

And as he lives out his faith within the constraints of his present frail mortality, the believer is to not give sway to sin by *obeying the overtures of lust*. Because this passage has several variants in the Greek manuscript evidence, it can be understood in slightly different ways:

- 1) Some variants speak of obedience directly to sin - “that you should obey it (sin),” which is consistent with the contextual reference to sin’s *reign*.
- 2) Other variants associate this obedience to sin with yielding to the lusts of the body. This wording reads: *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it (sin) by means of its (the body’s) lusts.*
- 3) The variant adopted by the NASB has the direct point of obedience being the lusts of the body rather than sin.

In spite of the subtle differences arising from the various readings, Paul’s language and grammar leave no doubt as to his meaning: *For the believer, letting sin “reign” amounts to listening to its “siren song” and submitting to its overtures which operate through the vehicle of the lusts associated with his present mortal weakness and imperfection.*

These “lusts,” however, must not be confined to bodily desires, immoral urges, or unethical enticements. Given the nature of sin, they must be understood as embracing every perspective, attitude, and/or passion that argues against the principle of the Christian’s new life in Christ.

- c. Paul’s second exhortation parallels its predecessor in that it, too, is a prohibition. It also repeats the same grammar, calling for the believer to leave off his former practice that marked him in his unbelief. But unlike the first directive, this one narrows the focus to the particulars of the believer’s *members* (6:13a). The former prohibition pertained to the *person* as he lives in this world; the present one pertains more narrowly to his *faculties* and *capacities*. Thus when Paul spoke of “members” he was not referring to body parts and limbs as such, any more than the term “mortal body” refers to the entire human body. Rather, he used the term *member* in reference to the physical/mental/emotional faculties and resources that belong to every person, and which can be employed for devotion to self (sin) or devotion to God (6:19, 7:5, 23; cf. also Colossians 3:5).

As well, this second directive is the first of three in which the concern is volitional, submissive *self-presentation* - here, the presentation of one’s faculties, capacities, and human resources. These final three directives are related to the first in that they build upon the “lordship” idea it introduced. That is, they show that the way in which sin effectively regains its “reign” over the believer is by him presenting himself to it as its “servant” (cf. 6:16-20). Therefore, to not let sin reign (6:12) is to not present oneself to it as an instrument of its service (6:13).

Specifically, in the present instance Paul called for the Romans to no longer follow their former way of life that consisted in presenting their members as “*instruments of unrighteousness.*” The noun *instrument* refers to any tool or implement used for accomplishing an objective, and elsewhere Paul employed it with respect to weaponry (cf. Romans 13:12; 2 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4).

Some attribute the same sense to this context, in which case it would seem that Paul was exhorting the Romans to not present their faculties and human capacities to sin as weapons it can use in the promotion and service of unrighteousness. This is certainly a possible meaning, but Paul's language is that of a subject and his service to a sovereign. For this reason it is more likely that his meaning was more general: the believer is not to present himself and his personal "resources" as implements of service - in any form - to his old master (sin).

- d. But it is not enough for the Christian to leave off the patterns, practices, and allegiances that formerly defined him in his unbelief and estrangement; he is to live out his new life and new identity in devoted service to his new master. *He is to present himself to God as one alive from the dead* (6:13b). Here Paul was drawing upon his previous statements regarding Christ in His resurrection and the Christian's union with Him in it. As Christ "lives to God" in His resurrection life (6:10), so the believer is to reckon himself also alive to God (6:11). But this reckoning is to be attended with the practical response of a conscious self-presentation to God. The one who reckons himself alive to God is to live out that reality; *he is to be in practice who he is in reality*.

And so this third directive mirrors the first one by showing how the believer's refusal to serve his previous master (sin) is to be attended with the redirection of his service to his new master, who is God Himself in Christ. But again it is vitally important to observe that both responses - *refusal* of the former master and *self-presentation* to the new master - proceed out of the consciousness of a new principle of *being* that has come about through union with Christ.

As Paul transitions from the second to the third exhortation there is a shift in his grammar that is important to observe. Whereas both of his prohibitions (6:12 and 6:13a) were expressed using negated present tense imperatives, Paul employed the aorist imperative in his two positive commands (6:13b and 6:13c). Some have proposed that this switch in tense indicates that he wanted his readers to think of their self-presentation to God as a "once-for-all" act. But this "one time" idea seems strained given Paul's portrayal of sin as a constantly looming threat. The context better supports the conclusion that he was calling upon the Romans - as those who were alive to God in Christ - to regard their presentation of themselves to God as *the defining orientation* of their new lives.

- e. So also, just as their refusal to give sin reign in their lives included their refusal to yield their members to its service, so also their self-presentation to God included the presentation of their members to Him as instruments of righteousness. Once again Paul's prohibition has a corresponding positive directive. The first prohibition found its positive parallel in the third exhortation, and the second prohibition finds its parallel in this, the fourth exhortation. It is not enough for the believer to withhold his members from the service of his old master and its unrighteousness; he must present them to his new Master as devoted implements for the sake of working and promoting righteousness (6:13c).

At the same time, Paul was not here departing from his gospel doctrine of a full righteousness reckoned by faith. He was not saying that the Romans were to serve God for the sake of contributing to or increasing in their own personal righteousness. Rather, he was speaking of the practical righteousness that is manifested in the lives of those who share in Christ's righteousness. Paul was simply reaffirming that the believer has the responsibility to *be who he is*. As one who is clothed with Christ's righteousness by virtue of participating in His atoning death, the Christian has also been raised from the dead to walk in newness of life. His *forensic* (legal) righteousness brings with it the new birth and the transforming power of the indwelling Spirit (8:28-30; also 2 Corinthians 3:1-18). This being so, he is to "live into" the work of renewal taking place within him; he is to manifest his true identity by "walking in the Spirit" (ref. Galatians 5:16-25).

9. After presenting his four practical directives, Paul returned once again to restate the *objective*, gospel basis for the believer's life of sanctity (6:14). It was seen that the first of the four exhortations (6:12) is primary in that it introduces the principle of dominion (lordship) that the next three presuppose and interact with. In other words, it is a person's *lord* to whom he presents himself and his members as *servant*. And in verse 6:13 Paul insisted that the believer has a new master: sin's lordship has been replaced by God's.

Nevertheless, sin still continues to operate in the regenerate soul. This is the very reason Paul began by insisting that the Christian is not to allow sin to exercise any lordship in his life. But where is the confidence that such a demand can be met? More precisely, are the resource and power for denying sin's reign to be found within the believer himself? If that is the case, then Paul's exhortation is empty in its idealism, and is nothing more than a call for pseudo-Christian moralism. Indeed, the command to no longer let sin reign would be pointless without the affirmation that sin shall not - not **should not**, but **cannot** - be master over the believer. Moo observes: "*One may as well tell a drowning person simply to swim to shore as tell a person who is under sin's mastery not to let sin reign.*"

Thus Paul concludes this small context by reiterating and reemphasizing to the Romans the divine basis and objective framework for his four directives. As those in Christ, they were to no longer serve sin as their master. But their resource and power for obeying his demand lay not with themselves, but with the God whom they now served as Lord. *Paul could insist upon their daily, practical refusal of sin's lordship for the simple reason that sin's reign had been broken by virtue of their death and resurrection to new life in Christ.* It was not that sin no longer sought mastery; like a deposed king it would continue to seek to reinstate its authority and dominion. But it *had* been deposed once and for all by Christ's victory, and Paul was calling the Romans to "live into" that reality.

Grace - not personal righteousness, power, or efforts - has conquered sin's dominion and emptied it of its power. Grace triumphed at Calvary, and now, by the indwelling Spirit, it continues to bring its victory to fruition in the lives of those united with Christ. *Law* cannot serve sin's conquest for the simple reason that it places all demand squarely upon *men*, as Paul will demonstrate shortly (7:1-25; cf. Galatians 3:10). But grace triumphs with certainty and finality because it depends solely upon *God's* will and power. Thus the Christian has every reason to run his race with confidence - the battle is the Lord's.

In verse 6:14 Paul again introduced the issue of *law* as a point of contrast in his argumentation. He did so previously in the context of his discussion of *faith* as the basis of the believer's righteousness (3:27-31), and in the present passage law is contrasted with *grace*. And as much as the relationship between law and faith has been a lightning rod for theological controversy, so also is the relationship between law and grace.

As has so often been the case, the key to understanding Paul's statement in 6:14 is his redemptive-historical perspective, and specifically the way in which he viewed salvation history as being partitioned into two distinct ages. In chapter five this duality was centered in the mediating representation of the two "Adams," and here it is focused upon the two core principles associated with each age, namely *law* and *grace*. The former age is here characterized by law, and the present age by grace.

In considering this partitioning of law and grace it is crucial first of all to understand that, though the Old Covenant has been Paul's focal point in his discussion of law, his present statement looks beyond the Mosaic Law to the principle of law as such. It certainly includes the Old Covenant, but it is not constrained to it. It is for this reason that he was able to characterize the entire period of salvation history preceding the coming of Christ as the age of law.

- The most obvious proof that Paul was not confining his meaning of *law* to the Law of Moses is the fact that the Old Covenant was limited in both time and scope. It did not exist prior to Sinai, and the Gentile Christians at Rome had never come under its jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the *principle* of law, as embodying the obligation of personal righteousness before God, has always existed. Man was created as image-bearer for the express purpose of communion with God. This means that human righteousness must be understood, not in terms of conduct per se, but the perfect intimacy with God that defines authentic human existence. Every human being - not just Jews under the Law of Moses - has this obligation to fulfill his created purpose, and his failure to do so constitutes his unrighteousness, regardless of how moral or ethical his personal life may be.
- It is this obligation that "law" addresses, whether in its Old Covenant formulation or otherwise. Thus Paul's use of the term *law* - though contextually more oriented toward the Mosaic Code - has universal reference and relevance. Because the principle of law addresses man's responsibility to be who he was created to be (his *form* as divine image-bearer reveals his intended *function*), it pertains equally to Jew and Gentile; to those prior to Sinai and outside of the Old Covenant as well as those under it.
- In this way *law* is seen to be the paradigm of the former age - the age that began with Adam and that has now passed away with the coming of the new age in the last Adam. By contrast, the paradigm of the new age is *grace*. This is not to say, however, that the obligation of personal righteousness (authentic humanity) has been abrogated with the passing of law as governing principle. Indeed, it could never be so, for every person in every age has the responsibility to fulfill his created purpose. Rather, the obligation of righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ. It is this fulfillment that is reckoned to the believer, so that his personal righteousness is entirely a matter of grace. The righteousness that the law disclosed and insisted upon is fulfilled by grace.