

Sermon 45: Romans 6:13: Presenting ourselves to God

OUTLINE

Not presenting your members to sin

The mindgate

The eygate

INTRODUCTION

Time and time again I have come across those who call themselves Christians but who have a deficient view of holiness. There are many confessing Christians who see Christianity and the holy life merely as one of the things that they do instead of being the canvas for their whole lives. Holiness by this wrong definition is made up of things that are done on Sundays like wearing smart clothes, going to church, giving money, and usually the whole thing is seen as a type of punishment that they have to suffer through as if they were somehow making up for their sins by punishing themselves with religiosity. I have had many conversations with these types of people where we are discussing things like sex before marriage; or a Christian not getting drunk; or married men looking lustfully at the young ladies. I have mentioned that a Christian is someone who seeks to live for the Lord in holiness, and does not do certain things, that holiness is not a set of religious activities for Sunday but the way in which we live our whole life in love, for God's glory and according to His will. I have even been accused of fanaticism for stressing that Christians should seek to be holy at all times, that we should be seeking to glorify God in all things and that there is no part of our lives where we do not seek to honour God as an act of love by conforming to His will in a display of His own moral perfection in our behaviour.

Today as we continue with Paul's discussion of holiness, we come to the next command in 6:13, '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.' We can see already even at one glance that holiness for Paul consists of things that we do not do with our members and lives; and then a positive side with giving ourselves to God in service for His righteous purposes. Today's message then is going to be a practical one where we look at how we must not present our members to sin, and how we are to present our whole selves to God.

We will see that holiness is not something that we do, but it is how we do everything. It is not a few religious acts but a life given over to God in loving obedience.

Not presenting your members to sin

Once again in this small paragraph of 12-14 Paul gives us another imperative, a command. We need to constantly stress one thing every time we look at these commands. Firstly, we only have the ability to obey the command because of the reality of our being united to Christ, being filled with the Spirit and being regenerated all enabling us to do so. If an

unbeliever who is not yet joined to Christ's resurrection life were to try and obey this command of not surrendering their members to sin they would fail. We might see an outward ceasing of a particular form of behaviour but the self-enthroned way of life would merely show itself in another form and area of the unbeliever's life. This command carries with it the reminder that we are free from our old citizenship in Adam and sin no longer has the hold and sway over us that it once had, therefore we are now in a God-given position to be able to obey this otherwise impossible command. Our obedience flows from His supplies, He provides where He commands.

Some commentators have stressed that Paul seems to be alluding to a military metaphor with the use of the words, 'present' and 'instrument'. Instrument has been translated by some as 'weapon' and present carries the meaning of presenting yourself for military service. We are quite familiar with the concept of volunteer police men or volunteers for military service where men who are keen to serve their countries offer themselves to serve in their spare time or in emergencies. The verse before us is something like us, 'Do not present (volunteer) your members to sin as instruments (weapons) of unrighteousness.' A Christian who willingly surrenders the parts of his life to be used in the service of sin is like an Afghanistan man who has fled the country and found safety in America. America takes him in and gives him citizenship with all its benefits, but he then returns to Afghanistan and joins the fight with the insurgents against the American forces. Paul is trying to stress that a Christian offering one's self to sin is a high contradiction and should not be done. In fact a Christian who gives themselves over to sin is doing something more terrible than if an unbeliever were to do the same deed. When we, who are united and married to Christ hand ourselves over to sin, it is like a wife or husband committing adultery. We are in a new state of relationship as we have been united with Christ but we live in denial of it. When we make a return to sin we deny the power of Christ's death in our lives; we deny the precious price that was paid to set us free and we deny the new person that Christ has made us to be with a new set of desires and delights.

Paul in fact is doing nothing more than working out the true definition of holiness. Sinclair Ferguson makes the following comments regarding holiness, 'God separates men and things for His own possession and purpose. More fully, 'to sanctify' means that God repossesses persons and things that have been devoted to other uses, and have been possessed for purposes other than His glory, and takes them into His own possession in order that they may reflect His own glory.'¹ Every Christian is a saint and is therefore a set apart one.

Paul indicates that it is not just one area of our lives but our whole lives that are to be denied sins repossessing of us. The word 'members' although speaking primarily about our various body parts would cover every part of who we are as a person. Let us not get the wrong impression here, although Paul uses a word that suites our outward action, he is not excluding the inner man.

¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p140.

The Mindgate

John Bunyan is best known for the allegory Pilgrim's Progress, but he has written a lesser known work called Holy War. It is an allegory of conversion and backsliding in the Christian life. There is a city called Mansoul, and there are various gates to get into this city. There is the eyegate and the eargate. The devil was once enthroned in Mansoul but was ousted by Christ. However, the enemy continues to wage war and it is through these gates that the enemy is able to enter if we do not post guards. So I will discuss not surrendering our members to sin in terms of the mindgate, eyegate and eargate.

So let us begin with the mind then. It is most important for us to start here because you will see that all sin and temptation has to go through our minds before it can have us. If we give up the mindgate we will soon find sin manifesting itself in all the areas of our lives. Let me speak about guarding the mind under two headings, keeping perspective and keeping discipline.

Firstly, keeping perspective. In order for holiness to flow in the life of a Christian there are certain vital truths that will have to be held in the forefront of our minds. This is not merely my opinion but the thing Paul has been stressing in our section in Romans as he calls on the Romans to 'consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' We need to keep in the forefront of our minds the new reality that we have been made to share in being united to Christ. We are no longer slaves; we do have a new inner willingness for holiness; it is possible to quit addiction; we can slowly progress and become better people. Not because we have found some new strength in ourselves, but because we have been grafted into the life of Christ and His strength is now available to us and working in us. Let me make this more concrete in the face of an actual temptation. You find yourselves at a crossroads, I won't specify the sin for you, you think back to that last sense of your being tempted to do something wrong. Think of the things your mind thought. 'I need it.' 'I won't be able to hold out forever I might as well give in now.' 'Once won't hurt.' 'I might as well have a little joy in my life.' And so we could multiply the stupid things that we think to ourselves in order to deceive ourselves in our sinning. At the base of it all we have essentially forgotten what we are. We are not those who love sin more than God anymore. We are those who do truly delight in holiness and to do His will. We are not dead in sin and a captive to its will. We have forgotten that true joy is not found in sin, and we have believed that lie that we cannot be satisfied without it. Here we see how keeping perspective helps us in our fight against sin. Accepting these lies is to open the mind gate, and that is a foot in the door. So essentially this means we have to fill the mind to keep sin filling it.

This guarding of our minds is an ongoing battle that we have to be engaged in. This is where the frontline of spiritual warfare is taking place in your life, the battle is for the mind. Paul gives us some insight into what we need to do as we wage this war, 2Cor. 10:4-6, 'For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every

disobedience, when your obedience is complete.’ Paul here is talking about refuting false teaching and practicing church discipline as the weapons of our spiritual warfare. But notice verse 5, how our warfare consists in destroying false arguments, taking every false thought captive to Christ. This means that when we think that sin is destined to win, we remember the truth that Christ has conquered sin and take it captive to Christ. When the devil tells us that we have sinned too big this time, we take that lie captive to the truth that Christ has paid for our sins in full, even the big ones. When we feel the lie arising in us that we are just one of those people who loves sin more than God we remember that we are new creatures in Christ with genuine new desires for holiness and God. We need to preach these things to ourselves when the lies assault us.

Secondly, we have keeping discipline. Where keeping perspective is to keep the mind filled with the truth; keeping discipline is all about keeping the wrong thoughts out of our minds. Here is a little test to see whether you are good at the discipline of guarding your thoughts. When you catch yourself having allowed a sinful thought to develop in your minds, whether it is lust, anger, greed, unforgiveness, etc.; how long have you been thinking the thought before you caught yourself in the middle of it? Those who are well practiced and have a lifestyle of guarding the mind will find that they are quick to catch themselves in a thought, but those who are lazy in this discipline and have a mind that is handed over to sin will find that they will be thinking a thought for a while before they come to themselves and realise that they had been entertaining sinful thoughts. It was Martin Luther who said something like this, ‘You cannot prevent a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop it from nesting in your hair.’ What he meant by that is that because we are sinners we have knee jerk thoughts that fly into our minds in various situations. Often time we cannot help that the thought came, but to linger in the thought, to develop the thought, to allow it to grow into a full blown miniseries is where we have the ability to say no.

The mind really is the key to Christian holiness. With the mind we contemplate the truth of what God has done in grace for undeserving sinners and we find gratitude and worship giving impetus to holiness. With the mind we consider the truths of our union with Christ and the fact that we are dead to sin and no longer under its domain and remember the deliverance that is ours so that we can expect victory and not inevitable defeat. The mind influences the emotions that we feel. If we turn our minds upon Christ and think deeply upon His worth and suffering we will see corresponding emotions of awe and adoration. Our love towards sin will shrink and love to God will increase. If we think about how badly we have been treated by our spouses; and how ungrateful they seem to be; and concentrate on the measure of what we should have received we will feel anger, self-pity, resentment and unforgiveness. And so we need to keep our minds thinking about the right things and empty of the wrong things. As Paul puts it in Philippians 4:8-9, ‘Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.’

The eyegate

Let's reflect for a moment on how Christ says darkness overtakes a person. Matthew 6:22-23 (ESV) "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" We have spoken about the mindgate, now let's reflect on the eyegate. We are reflecting on how sin progresses, let's reflect on the eyegate and how it allows this darkness to overtake us. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount uses three pictures to expose our hearts in the area of greed/materialism. He uses the idea of treasure, v19-21, the idea of serving 2 masters, v24, and sandwiched in between the picture of the eyes being the lamp of the soul. It is most significant that eyes are discussed in connection with materialism, especially in our internet age, where we can sample things from all over the world with our eyes, endlessly surfing the net engorging upon the images of our greeds. The picture is a simple one. Your heart is the house, and in the walls are windows, your eyes. Like all people through all ages you want to build so that your house has its windows facing the light, if not your whole house will be dark. Jesus compares eyes that are set upon this world's goods as the means of darkening the house. Worldliness, how does it begin? By you giving your eyes to the things of this world, and when you constantly set something before your eyes, it will constantly be in your heart, and if it is constantly in your heart, it will govern and dictate all your actions. Your whole life will be dominated by nurtured concern for the things of this world. And just like the ancient Egyptians used to wash and clothe their gods everyday, putting food before them, engaging in time consuming rituals for them, you will serve your lusts, and your life will be typified by that service. No one can serve two masters! Yet if our eyes are given to the light, if we turn our eyes upon the light everyday, we will be filled with light. If you are finding your house is full of darkness, that the general atmosphere of your life is one of sin, that holiness is constantly living in a choking cloud of pollution and you hardly ever able to catch a breath of fresh air, you should take stock on what goes through the eyegate and regulate it more carefully.

On this issue of the eyes let me say a few words about the permissive attitudes towards lust in our society today. Our society as a whole has grown in shameless looking. Think for a moment about a photograph. If you look at the picture of a person on a magazine cover you are able to examine and scrutinize their appearance without any accountability. When you have a conversation with someone in the street, as you look at someone they are also looking at you. Unless you are shameless you do not have the freedom to just safely gaze on their features drinking them in, rather you are subdued in your interaction with them. Your eyes are locked on theirs; you are focused on what is being communicated. The existence of photography has created a culture of shameless looking. But things have advanced further than that. Today you will hear men and women talking about going to the gym to have a little eye candy. What they mean is they are going to lust over the fit bodies of those in the gym. You hear married men and woman speaking about having a look at the menu but not ordering, thinking that this is form of faithfulness to their spouses. I know of wives who have allowed their husbands a look but don't touch policy in this regard. However, a look but don't touch policy does not last long. Christians have a divorce rate as high as the worlds and this is one of the reasons why. We have not followed Job's example

in making a covenant with our eyes not to long upon the opposite sex lustfully. Nor have we taken Christ's words in the Sermon on the mount seriously that lust in the secrecy of our hearts where no one can see and no one is hurt is equal to adultery in God's books.

The eargate

Finally we come to the eargate. In Paul's day the eargate would have been less assaulted than it is in our day. The eargate has to contend with lies and deception, the temptation to participate in the sins of gossip and slander; it is a road to the heart and many have been wounded by verbal abuse. However, in our own day with the multiplying of the media and large media companies trying to hook the pockets of one of the largest spending bodies in the world with an expendable income—teenagers. Our children are faced with an increasing amount of temptation. We are seeing an increase of lust, rebellion, violence, and many other sins and sinful attitudes boasted about and celebrated. We are hearing worldview shaping values that encourage sexual promiscuity, valuing ourselves according to our sexual performance, love portrayed as lust, physical beauty of youth as the highest possession, etc. We are facing many temptations today at the eargate, and we need to post extra guards here.

If you are someone who is unwilling to walk the path of abstinence, which in many instances is not realistic; nor willing to be satisfied with a Christian substitute, let me suggest two things. Firstly, following the advice of James Montgomery Boice, let me encourage you to read as much Bible as you watch TV and listen to secular music. For every secular book you read, read a Christian book. Count out the hours, keep a check on it and deliberately read as much Bible, listen to sermons and pray. Secondly, don't be a mindless consumer of every value that you are exposed to. We need to be constantly discerning in everything that we encounter in our society. Culture is not neutral but is the product of sinful human beings pursuing their sinful desires. We need to constantly be aware of the Bible's worldview and values and discern all the time. This will mean that that reckless abandon of taking pleasure in a song that is promoting lust will have to be put away. As we are constantly being shaped and transformed by our interaction with God's truth it will be very hard for us to love what He hates, and hate what He loves. Become fussy and principled in what you take from the flood of media that is being poured at you. Parents can help their children learn this skill of discerning by talking about the movies they watch together, by pointing out the crooked values and stereotypes that are being promoted in advertising. Posting these guards will be the best protection for not presenting your members to sin.