

Sermon 47: Romans 6:14: Sin will have no dominion over you

OUTLINE

Sin will have no dominion over you

Not under law

Under grace

INTRODUCTION

The world is not flat it is round! The surprise of learning that fact would have rearranged so much in the thinking of those who learnt it. Things would not feel very different, but everything had changed. This was what happened to me when I learned what Paul has been trying to teach us in Romans 6:1-14. My world was flat. I knew that Jesus had died for my sins and I was going to heaven. I saw Jesus death and raising as serving only this purpose with the hope of final glorification guaranteed by the indwelling Spirit. I had no idea of the doctrine of union with Christ and the part it played in even making justification possible never mind the part that it played in sanctification. To realise that the resurrection of the new heavens and the new earth, that resurrection of which Jesus is the first fruits. That was the power that caused me to be regenerated, and now as the Holy Spirit dwells in me I am plugged into, grafted into, having communion with that powerful life and it is conferring its benefits to me, changing me into that image. I was staggered to learn that growth in grace was not an act of the will, or mind but a real spiritual change into Christ's image and a participation in new creation life in Him. That holiness was appropriated to me by the Holy Spirit directly from Christ as I employed the unspectacular means of grace. The world all of a sudden became round and makes so much more sense. It is my hope that this has been your experience as we have looked at these verses. That the apparently lonely and futile activity of trying to quit sin and be like Jesus is not God teasing us with impossibilities but a possibility due to our union with Christ. That you have a new optimism where once there was defeatism. That you have a new understanding of how the Spirit cooperates with our efforts and we are building with lasting materials something that will endure the fire and not be burned up. The new vistas that are opened before as we view what God is doing in our lives from the perspective of our union with Christ has caused us to see deeper and farther into the wonder of God's gracious work of salvation. I do hope that you take away the practical points about cultivating habits of holiness in guarding our lives and living a lifestyle of repentance, but foundational to it all is the bedrock of our union with Christ that mediates this new creation glory to us. I feel like a poor man who has struck oil.

As we come to Romans 6:14 I do confess to feel a little frustrated at how little we have said about these things. But here we come to a break in Paul's argument, a place where he concludes v1-13. Paul has been telling us why it is impossible to live in sin and has illuminated us to the dynamic new creation life that is mediated to us by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. That we are planted in soil that produces otherworldly fruit in the image of Christ. That being planted into Christ's life and death we now are removed from Adam and are being irresistibly pushed from sin to holiness. In answer to why it is

impossible for Christians to live in sin he writes, 'For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.' Today we will be pulling together Paul's thoughts on three issues, not being under the dominion of sin, not being under the law and being under grace.

Sin will have no dominion over you

Part of the reason why I struggled to get my head around sanctification in connection with my union with Christ is because some men have wrongly read this one verse. You see if you approach Romans 6 focusing only on the legal benefits of being united to Christ and pay no attention to the transforming power of that union you read the whole passage very differently. Think of the words of Romans 6:14 only in terms, not of a transforming union with Christ but a legal one. 'For sin shall have no dominion over you for you are not under law but under grace.' Read wrongly they sound something like this. 'God has justified by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ conferring upon you a new legal status and identity. It is on account of this new status and identity that you will no longer come under the legal powers of sin or the law you will one day be fully free from the effects of the law in your glorified bodies.' Is it all true? Yes! Is it all the truth? No!

Paul certainly has been arguing in other parts of this letter that sin's legal hold over us is over because the law has been fulfilled in Christ's active and passive obedience. Romans 5:12-21 would be a good example of this. However, Paul has changed topic and is addressing the reason why it is impossible for a Christian to continue to live in sin. If we accept the purely legal view then the only motivation on offer is this one: 'Christ has given you a new identity and destiny—live up to it!' However, this is at best incomplete. Firstly, Paul is not giving us a command in saying 'For sin shall no longer have dominion over you.' He did not say, 'Therefore, do not let sin have dominion over you.' Paul is giving us an indicative not an imperative. He is stating a fact about those who have been united with Christ which gives rise to the commands of v11-12. Secondly, Paul is giving us the reason why we cannot continue in sin and it has to do with the present benefits of our being dead to sin in Christ and raised with Him. Paul's allusion to our new position in grace and not law reflects a new transforming reality more than merely a new legal one. The word 'dominion' means 'lord it over' us. And it is not referring to the defeats that a Christian faces in their fight against sin, but rather the position of being in Adam with all the ramifications of not being God's child. As you read this phrase I am sure that you are wondering what struck me when I read it. 'If I am freed from the power of sin, why do I and other Christians get so bogged down in sin? What about Christians who get addicted to various things?' I intend to deal with these questions in the second half of chapter 6 but at least let me say that 'dominion' is not a Christian addicted to something. Sin having dominion over you would mean that you would be dead spiritually, without the Spirit, going to hell, etc. Not that you were struggling with a besetting sin. How we get besetting sins, and how we get rid of them leaning on the power of our union with Christ will be addressed in future studies in Romans 6.

Sin's dominion over us is a multifaceted thing and is not only limited to the legal or transformational aspects of our salvation. Lets review how we are no longer under sin's dominion now that we are united to Christ.

No longer being under sins dominion means firstly that I am no longer under the penalty of sin. I am no longer under the condemnation of sin. Sin no longer controls my eternal destiny in sentencing me to death by God's law. Christ is my new master who secures a new eternity for me. This is the legal aspect of my union with Him.

Secondly, God by the Holy Spirit drew me into union with Christ when the Gospel was preached to me and caused me to participate in His resurrection life when I was born again. He united Himself to me and the effect was my heart of stone was turned to a heart of flesh; then I was made alive and I united myself to Him by my faith. My faith as with every other good deed in my life finds its source in being grafted into Christ's own life by the Spirit.

Thirdly, the idol factory of my heart was filled with the Holy Spirit, now especially the Spirit of Christ. He now acts on Christ's behalf in and to me taking all that is Christ's and making it mine. He is the one who plugs me into Christ and mediates the benefits of Christ's resurrected humanity to me causing a transformation of my fallen humanity into Christ's perfect humanity.

Fourthly, sin still dwells in me, but as a dethroned power who can never take the throne even though it may appear to win a few battles. This means that I am continually waging a war but fighting from the position of victory which Christ's resurrection has brought about so that I can see progress, slow as it is, but not perfection until glorification. This involves reminding myself of this new and wonderful reality as the platform from which I fight; of doing all of my doing out of the strength that He supplies; of practically not letting sin have my body as its instrument; positively presenting myself to God in a life of repentance.

Fifthly, sin has been dealt a death blow that will be completed when Christ glorifies our bodies and removes every last effect of sin in all of our beings.

I am able to be tempted, I am able to let sin have its way in me for a while, but sin can never drag me back and reverse these things regaining dominion over me. It can never undo my new legal standing of justified. It can never uproot me from my union with Christ killing the resurrection life that He gave me reinstating a state of loving sin and hating God. Although the Spirit can be grieved which can have severe consequences on my spiritual walk sin is not stronger than the Spirit to kick Him out. It may win some battles but it cannot win the war.

But let me make one last go of this teaching before we leave it. Paul is saying in the context of v12-14, you are dead, the old man is crucified, sin no longer has the rule, therefore don't give it your body but give God your all, for sin has been defeated, and this has direct bearing on you living a holy life now. Do you see this? I feel like this is something that I need to shout about in order to stress. I feel like I don't want to move on from it until I know by the marvel on your faces that we are all on the same page. Do you see the position of security and the position of victory that you are in? I am not asking us to undermine our foe, but to see the glory of what God has done for us in uniting us to Christ.

There is so much hope, so much strength, so much possibility if we will but see it and cooperate with the Spirit in applying these benefits to us.

Not under law

Here we see the reason why sin will no longer have dominion over the Christian, they are no longer under law. What law is Paul talking about? He is not talking about the Mosaic law, but law in general. Remember back to chapter two when Paul told us that every person has broken God's law, that the Gentile had the law of God written on their hearts, and the Jews had the 10 Commandments, but no matter the form of the law every person knew it and broke it and was accountable to God. It is this general category of law that Paul is alluding to. How is it that every man is under law? Adam was placed under law in the Garden of Eden. It was a covenant of law whereby he had the opportunity to represent humanity as our federal head, and by his obedience or disobedience he could bring about blessing or cursing. Adam was supposed to endure in obedience and being confirmed in righteousness would have won God's blessing not only for himself but all of humanity. Instead he failed, and he never graduated from being under that law, and since we have inherited his guilt and corruption we too are still bound under law and are unable to free ourselves from it and bring ourselves into the blessings of obedience that Adam missed. The Mosaic covenant was merely a restatement of the covenant of works. The borders of the Garden of Eden were redrawn in the borders of Israel, the covenant was restated on a geo-political level with the promises of the blessings and cursings for obedience and disobedience. If Israel was obedient they would inherit the physical blessings of land and abundance, but if they disobeyed the law of the covenant they would be kicked out of the land as our first parents were from the Garden. God was not calling on these fallen human beings to actually save themselves by their works, no God saved His people by faith in Christ as He was preached through the sacrificial system and types and prophecies and promises. No, instead God intended to teach us about the totally helpless state that we are in to help ourselves by law, to aggravate our condition by exposing how impotent we are to save ourselves, and how we will only bring ourselves under judgement. Seeing our sin we should rather run to God for mercy trusting in the provided sacrifice for atonement than trusting in our deeds. The failure of the Mosaic covenant in exile into Assyria and Babylon set us up to see the need of a new covenant that God would establish where He would save us by His grace and do a renovating work in our hearts to enable obedience. This comes to pass in Christ who came as our second Adam and He obeyed where the first sinned, and He saved where the first condemned. In being united to Christ by faith we are removed from the realm of relating to God through law for salvation, to the realm where God in His grace provides a substitute law keeper who frees us from the penalty and slavery of sin.

Given our present condition in sin and being under the law we are prisoners and condemned. John Murray gives us 7 points about the law which will help us see what Paul is getting at. The law can do 5 things, but cant do 2 things. Firstly, we will look at the things that the law can do. The law outlines the commands and demands of God. The law pronounces approval and blessing upon obedience to its standards. The law pronounces condemnation upon every failure to meet its standards. The law exposes and convicts of

sin. The law, though being good and pure put before a sinful heart incites to sin. The two things the law cannot do are, firstly, it cannot justify those who have broken it. Secondly, it offers no power to us to relieve us from the bondage of sin. Therefore when we tried to make any attempt to save ourselves by the law by keeping the law, John Owen describes this situation as being driven like a soldier to throwing ourselves on the sword of our enemy. We must be holy, and so are driven, but we cannot succeed, and so we are thrust upon the sword of the law which wounds our consciences and kills us and aggravates our sinful condition. Our two main problems while being under law were our legal guilt and our enslavement to sin. Paul has been showing us as he has led us through these 6 chapters of Romans that it is these two problems that God solves in the Gospel. By uniting us to His Son we are taken out of the covenant relation we bore to Adam and we become Christ's. And so we now have His righteousness dressing us in holy garments and paying for our sins; and we are united to Christ's resurrection power enabling a new vibrant holiness where once we were dead in our sins and slaves to our passions.

Under grace

Under grace means so many things. It means that we are under new management. Our new boss is not a killer who hates us and wants to see us destroyed because we bear some resemblance even though fallen to God. We were under the devil's authority like a prisoner under the prison warden. We are under a new status. Where once we were dead men walking on death row who were condemned to death and guilty; we now have a new legal status. Not only are we not guilty, but we are righteous, not only are we righteous but we are the righteousness of the holiest person who ever has or will live—Jesus Christ, not only are we enemies who have been acquitted and counted as righteous but we have been made friends and adopted into the family of God as co-heirs with Christ. We have a new life. Not merely a life like Lazarus who would die again but rather a life like Christ's—eternal life. We have a new power. Where once we were dead in trespasses and sins and the only power source was the tainted, polluted, addicted, biased one of our own bare nature inherited from Adam, we have now been regenerated by the power of Christ's Spirit with a new life and impulse for holiness. But moreso we have not been left to draw strength for our lives on the weak dregs of our fallen bodies, but have been plugged into Christ's life and resurrection. And more than that we have the person of the Spirit resident within us making all of this possible and more.

We are under grace, and as that relates to not living in sin this means that we are no longer puppets, filled with power, able to progress. We have provisions for the commands we have been given. We have access to prayer when we need mercy, boldness, wisdom, power. We have a family who are conduits of God's grace to us in their prayers, words, encouragements, rebukes, examples, and service. We have the light of the word where once we only had the darkness of man's opinion. We having the teacher of the Holy Spirit where once we were our own blind guide. We are never alone in the work of sanctification but having God working in us by His Spirit as a catalyst to start us in holy desiring and working. We are constantly aided with His strength added to our own puny ones and given grace greater than any earning power of our own contributions to grow fruits of the Spirit.

We begin to grow fruit from another world in the barren soil of my sinful life. All because I am now His child, in His Son, under grace.

Let me close making a few comments about motivation. There are many ways to motivate someone to be holy. I could shout at you tell you that you are going to go to hell if you don't be holy. But this is not what Paul is doing. Paul points us to the new reality of our union with Christ, the new world of salvation that has brought us into with so many benefits to me. He has pointed me to the dynamo of life that is now within me compelling me to holiness, and enabling my feeble efforts to succeed by His Spirit. He has shown me that I am not only clothed by the righteousness of His Son and fully loved and accepted in Him, but I am grafted into the life of His Son and have the privilege of being a garden where His fruits are caused to grow to the glory of God. We are the recipients of so much grace, that is why we should go out of this place and be holy. Not only because we should, but because we can.