PRESENT YOURSELVES TO GOD

Romans 6:1–23

Key Verse: 6:1*3*

“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteous-ness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

Are you struggling to subdue something negative in your life? It might be weeds in the garden, insomnia at night, our bodyweight, or our debts. In any case, our efforts to subdue these things might seem like a totally losing battle. No matter how much willpower or persistent effort we use, we may seem to be making no progress at all. In today’s passage Paul addresses our real struggle—sin—which can seem even more futile. In chapter 6 he repeats the word “sin” 17 times. He says sin can “reign” or have “dominion” over us (12,14) and make us helpless “slaves” (6,16,17,19,20), or, we can be “set free” (7,18,22). Paul refers to Christ the most in this chapter: 18 times. But we may ask ourselves, “If I really believe Jesus died for my sins, why is sin still controlling me? Is there any hope?” To help us, Paul first addresses how we, as Christians, think about sin (1–11), using mostly indicative verbs. Then, switching to mostly imperative verbs, he tells us what action we need to take (12–23). It’s not only negative (what we shouldn’t do) but also positive (what we should do). Using the word five times (13,16,19) Paul says we need to “present” ourselves to God. What does he mean? How can we do it? It’s further teaching on what living by faith in Jesus actually looks like. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

**First**, a new way of thinking about grace. Look at verse 1. As we saw in last week’s passage, Paul just taught that the grace of Jesus “abounds” for us, way more than our sin (5:15,17,20). He said that by faith we “stand” in this grace (5:2). He said that through Jesus this grace now “reigns” (5:21). He adds here in chapter 6 that we’re now “under” grace (14,15). What does he mean by this “grace”? Earlier he gave it a precise definition: God justifies us, even though we’re terrible sinners, “by his grace as a gift” (3:24). Jesus made this grace possible for us when shed his blood to turn God’s wrath away from us (3:25; 5:9).

But while introducing us to this abounding grace of Jesus in this letter, Paul also has been referring to how we sinful human beings tend to abuse grace. He wrote in 2:4, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” He put it even more boldly in 3:8: “And why not do evil that good may come?” People were accusing Paul of teaching faith in Jesus as a cheap grace that condones sin. So now he makes it crystal clear that this is totally untrue. Twice in chapter 6 he writes, “By no means!” (2,15) In Greek it literally means, “May it never be!” As Christians Paul wants us all to have a new way of thinking about grace. God’s grace in Jesus is not a free pass to keep on sinning; it’s a costly grace for which Jesus had to suffer and die to set us free.

**Second**, “baptized into his death” (2­–8). Look at verse 2. This is the first time in this chapter that Paul writes we “died to sin” (cf. 6,7,11). He uses the past tense, meaning it already happened. How did that happen? How did we die to sin? Read verses 3,4. Here Paul is talking about our Christian baptism. At that time when people professed faith in Jesus, they were baptized. It wasn’t just a sprinkling with water; they were totally immersed, completely dunked, in water to symbolize how they were dying with Christ to their old life of sin and rising with him to a totally new life. It didn’t mean a quick but temporary denial of sin; it meant total death, not just dying but being “buried” with Christ as well. Christ died and was raised from the dead not so that we could continue in our sin but so that we could “walk in newness of life” (4b).

Read verse 5. Here Paul explains Christian baptism as being “united” with Christ. It’s not that we believe in a remote transaction that Jesus died to free us from sin after this life is over; no, by faith we’re actually “united with him” now “in a death like his.” Paul adds a condition: “if” we’re united with him in a death like his now, we’ll “certainly” be united with him in a resurrection like his later. In Greek the words “united with” literally mean “born together.” When we accept that Jesus suffered and died to free us from our sin, our new life begins. Our new life continues as we always carry in our body the death of Jesus (2Co4:11), as we learn to share his sufferings and become like him in his death (Php3:10).

Paul makes his meaning here very pointed. Look at verse 6. Again, he’s using the past tense: “was” crucified. It already happened. But as we’ve seen, honestly we still struggle with sin—our sin is not really dead yet. Sin is very much alive in our mortal bodies, and it seems to defeat us all the time. So what does Paul mean? He’s not talking about our experience; he’s talking about how God sees us. When we accept Jesus’ death for our sin, God sees that our old self has already been crucified with Jesus. God’s purpose for us is already accomplished in Christ, to set us free from our sin (7). To live our new life, we first need to see things the way God does: by faith “our old self was crucified with him.” Paul wants to help our way of thinking further. Look at verse 8. This is to help us have hope for the future. Because Christ who died for our sins also rose from the dead to give us new life, we also “will live with him.” It’s both now and in the future. Only as we learn to depend on his resurrection power and put our hope in it can we get out of our cruel bondage to sin. We need this hope in our struggle.

**Third**, “consider yourselves dead to sin” (9–11). Look at verse 9. Christ’s resurrection was a total game-changer: death no longer has dominion over him. It also applies to those who believe in him. Look at verse 10. Christ’s death and resurrection become a model for us. He died to sin once for all, and now he lives to God. As we live by faith in him we experience this, too. Read verse 11. Here Paul switches to the imperative: “So you also must consider yourselves...”

How we think is so important. For example, if we think we’ll be defeated, we’ll most likely lose. If we think we’ll win, it’s much more possible, right? But Paul isn’t just teaching the power of positive thinking. He’s teaching gospel-centered thinking. Even before we experience any victory over our sin, we need to consider ourselves dead to sin, not because we can do it, but because Jesus did. Without faith in what Jesus accomplished for us through his death and resurrection, our struggle against sin really is in vain. But with faith in what he did, we realize that we’re already “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

**Fourth**, “present yourselves to God” (12–23). Paul isn’t talking about some idealized theology. He applies it directly to our real life struggles. Read verse 12. This is our negative struggle, not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies so that we obey its passions. There’s no other easier way. By faith we need to deny ourselves, meaning our sinful nature with its passions and desires (Mk8:34a; Gal5:22). By faith we need to put to death whatever is earthly in us: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness (Col3:5).

But there’s also a positive struggle. Read verse 13. Here, “members” literally means our limbs, our arms and hands, our legs and feet. We might include our eyes and mouths, our minds and hearts, really everything. And “instruments” literally means “weapons.” Paul is portraying our struggle vividly. We need to fight with all we’ve got, because, whether we realize it or not, we’re all in a spiritual battle. The devil is always trying to use us for his purposes, so he’s trying to tempt us and get us to give in to sin, to make us powerless and a bad influence. God wants to use us, too, for his good purposes. He wants to use our lives to bless others, to spread the good news of Jesus, to make a real difference in this sin-sick world. God isn’t asking us to be perfect first, before he’ll use us. We just have to get started now. We trust that Jesus already has made us righteous, and now, by faith, we present ourselves to God.

Paul explains this further in 12:1: “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” We need to do this not just once in a while, not just on Sundays, but each and every day: present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. It’s not just about our bodies—worship comes from our hearts. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Presenting ourselves to God means loving him wholeheartedly, with our all. In Christian living this is also called total consecration. We give God our minds, our hearts, our strength, and make ourselves available for his use, anytime, anywhere, every day. When our minds and hearts are so devoted to God, sin won’t get a hold on us.

We can present ourselves to God in so many ways. It all starts with prayer, with coming to God through faith in Jesus, asking his help and trying to follow his will ahead of our own. We also present ourselves to God all throughout the day. There’s a book by Brother Lawrence called *Practicing the Presence of God*. He said we can present ourselves to God when we’re washing dishes, cooking food, cleaning the house, doing laundry or any seemingly mundane thing. We do these things not just because they’re necessary but as the way to show we love God. It upgrades all we do. So Paul wrote elsewhere, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col3:23,24). We can present ourselves to God at our workplace, in our studies, in all we do. We also can be instruments of righteousness as we offer our time and energy to serving others with God’s love, word and prayer, pointing them to Jesus.

In the last part of the chapter Paul uses various illustrations to persuade us to engage in this struggle. He first says that we can either live as slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness (16). And slavery to righteousness is so much better. Under the law we were slaves of sin—we did just the bare minimum so as not to get in trouble. But under the grace of Jesus we’re slaves of righteousness—meaning we obey from the heart. And the standard of teaching we’ve been committed is so much better, too. It’s not about nitpicky rules; it’s about living in the grace of forgiveness, loving God and loving others unselfishly (17). Paul also warns us. Look at verse 18. Our “natural limitations” means our physical weakness. If we present ourselves to sin, we’ll only get more and more lawless. But if we present ourselves to God, it will gradually lead to our sanctification. If we continue living as slaves of sin, the results will be shame and death; if we live as willing slaves of God, it will end in our sanctification and eternal life, by the free grace of God (21–23). Justification and sanctification can seem intimidating. But the famous Westminster Catechism puts it simply: Justification is about our being pardoned of sin; sanctification is about our subduing sin.

Read verse 13 again. May God help us see ourselves by faith the way he does, as dead to sin but alive to him in Christ Jesus. May God help us engage newly in the battle to present ourselves to him as instruments of righteousness.