

## God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

### God's Victory over Human Evil: Presenting Ourselves to God *Romans 6:12 – 14*

#### Exegetical Outline

- 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body  
that you should obey its lusts,  
13 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.  
14 For sin shall not be master over you,  
for you are not under law, but under grace.

#### Introduction: The Hands of George Mueller

From Romans 5 onward, we learn about how God is restoring humanity. And to encourage you to take part in that, I'm going to offer four \$50 grants to those of you who come up with good ideas of how to use your brains, your hands, and your voices towards that end.

But let me first illustrate that principle by telling you the story of the hands of a young man named George. George grew up as the son of a tax collector. By the time George was 10 years old, his hands had pilfered his father's tax collections many times, forcing his father to pay for the losses. His father responded by sending him away to school in the hopes that young George would become a clergyman! But George kept his hands busy stealing and gambling. When he was fourteen, George was to be confirmed by the Lutheran church. He gave only one-twelfth the amount of money that his father had given him to pay the Lutheran minister. When George was fifteen, George's father went to another city for a while, but George continued collecting the tax money owed to his father. With this, he commenced a wild party he called his 'six days of sin.' When that money was exhausted, George checked into an expensive hotel for a week, then ran off before paying the bill. He tried this again, but was caught by the police and spent 24 days in jail. His father bailed him out and sent him back to school, where he studied for up to 18 hours a day. His drinking and his sleeping around continued, though. He forged letters from his father and the parents of his friends so they could spend a wild holiday weekend in Switzerland. During this time, he managed the group's finances and he skimmed off the top from his own friends. After they returned, one of his friends was stricken with remorse and started to attend a home Bible study. George went with him out of curiosity. He felt very awkward, but the host welcomed him warmly. They read from the Bible, sang a hymn, and read a printed sermon. Then they prayed, and young George felt a strange peace and joy deep within him. When he and his friend walked home that night, George said, 'All our former pleasures are as nothing compared to what we experienced tonight.'

Jesus Christ had touched George's heart that night, and George had finally yielded himself to him. George became united with his master, and his life was radically changed. He later moved to England and founded five houses for orphans that sheltered 2,000 children. Within his own lifetime he became known as a great preacher and a man of deep faith, who by prayer alone raised 1.5 million dollars to fund those orphanages. He never asked for money. Though I don't have anything against asking for money for good causes, I am impressed by this particular story. Before Christ, George's hands had stolen from everyone, including his father and his best friends. But after the Spirit of Christ had come inside him, his hands were folded in prayer, and he became a man of outstanding compassion. George Muller presented himself and his hands to Christ, that Christ might live through him.

#### Context:

We are in the sixth chapter of Romans. Paul has just explained beautifully how we are baptized into Jesus Christ, united with him in his death and resurrection. These are the two sides of the same coin that utterly transform us. The Holy Spirit comes into us, giving us a chance to start life over, joining us with Christ so that our old selfish nature fundamentally dies with Jesus at the Cross and our new identity – our new nature that is joined to God – is born afresh with Jesus in his Resurrection. We ended last time with the profound truth of v.11, 'Even so, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' That is a new identity

Reading this, we may be filled with questions. For some of you, who are new to Jesus and are at the start of getting to know him, you may be wondering, ‘Okay, I committed myself to Jesus – what happens now? How do I think about my life now?’ For others of you, you’re asking ‘What about my struggles with sin? What can I do to be free from this stuff?’ For a few of you, you may be in some form of crisis, where you don’t like how your life is going, whether you call yourself a Christian or not. Romans 6:12 – 14 helps answer those questions. This section might be short, but it is absolutely packed with great material.

As we read these three verses, we can make two observations. First, Paul issues us three commands: one in v.11 and two in v.12. We had no commands from 1:1 to 6:10 and suddenly now we have three crisp, clear orders. That has got to get our attention. Second, our old nemesis ‘sin’ appears three times also as what we are now opposing, as Paul directs us firmly to not respond to sin’s taunting. These commands to not respond to sin reflect our newfound freedom from sin. Previously, self-centeredness was the operating principle in our lives. Whatever form it took: self-preservation, self-promotion, self-worship. We also saw in Romans 1:18 – 3:20 that man’s great problem of sin and self-centeredness seemed incurable. But if we have come to Christ by faith, then something happens to us. We can and therefore must leave sin behind us because of this colossal change within us. So let’s study these verses in detail.

### **Do Not Let Sin Reign: v.12**

In v.12, Paul COMMANDS US, ‘Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies.’ This is the second imperative statement in the book of Romans. By direct implication, we now have a choice to make. The very fact that we now have a choice is astonishing. It speaks volumes of the work of Jesus Christ in us. He has freed us from enslavement to sin by coming to live in us. We now live in relationship to Jesus Christ and we are defined by him. We are not defined by sin. What is the ‘sin’ talked about here? Is it stealing, cheating, and lying? It includes that, but it is much deeper. Sin is at its evil root a twisted heart attitude whereby we turn to God and say four words to His face, ‘I don’t need You.’ It is therefore the attitude of self-sufficiency, and because the first of those four words is ‘I’, it is also an attitude of self-centeredness. That is what sin is, fundamentally.

Now if sin is not longer our identity, how does it affect us? Notice Paul adds the phrase, ‘in your mortal bodies.’ That is where sin tries to influence us. What Paul is doing is introducing us to the struggle that takes place in the rest of who we are. It’s a struggle between who I am now in my heart versus the rest of me: my old ways, thought patterns, habits, fears. The Spirit of Christ lives in us, bringing us unity with Christ as he lives out his life through us. That is who we are. Yet there is also the old part of us. It is not necessarily limited to our physical body, because it involves the mind and the emotions, too. Paul discusses this part of us--the flesh--in more detail in Romans 7.

Illus: What’s going on in our bodies is like the advance of the Allies in World War II after the storming of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The Allied troops swept into France and won that decisive victory, and from that point on, everyone knew that it was only a matter of time until the Allies beat the Nazis. Everyone knew it: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Hitler. But the battles still needed to be fought from the beaches of France to the Nazi strongholds throughout Europe. This is very similar to where we are now. Christ has won the decisive victory in us and he has arrived in our hearts if we have faith in him. But there are still the pockets of resistance, the skirmishes, that sin puts up because sin knows it’s dead meat. That’s why Paul points out that our bodies are mortal. Jesus will one day give us God-soaked eternal bodies like his, and then sin will have no place in us. But for now, there will be battles, and those battles will be in us.

So, how do we recognize sin? How does it fight? In the next phrase, Paul adds, ‘that you should obey its lusts.’<sup>1</sup> So our first clue is that sin tries to influence us through lust. Now the word lust itself means ‘a longing.’ It is used in the New Testament three times in a positive sense, where Jesus says he longs to share a Passover meal with his disciples in the kingdom of heaven. The remaining uses are all very negative. Specifically in the course of this book, the word lust refers us back to Romans 1:24, where we acknowledged that man apart from God is driven into impurity by lusts of the heart. Lust is typically an attitude of seeing, taking, and grabbing for oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> Not accidentally does the Law call this lust ‘covetousness.’ The Tenth Commandment tells it as it is: ‘Thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s house...your neighbor’s wife or his servant[s]...or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.’ That was how lust needed to be addressed in an agrarian society. We today are also very accustomed to being motivated by lots of lusts. In fact, we’ve been trained very well to do what is best for us, to get it all now, to go for the glory.

A great picture of lust that we have in the Bible is Samson, from the book of Judges. He goes to the land of the Philistines and sees a Philistine woman from Timnah. We don't have any indication that he talked her, or even know her name. Nevertheless, he goes back home to his parents and says, 'Get her for me, for she looks GOOD TO ME!' He sounds like a regular caveman. Yet we do the same thing today. How many times do we pass by a grocery store magazine rack and see that woman on the cover. If you're a man, lust whispers, 'Don't you want a woman like that, who is irresistible?' If you're a woman, lust whispers, 'Don't you want a body like that, so you'll be irresistible?' Lust is an ongoing struggle. Even Paul in Romans 7 admits he struggles with it. In this sense lust is our inordinate craving whereby we selfishly take, take, take to feed ourselves even to the detriment of others. Usually when we lust, we intend to acquire something, and we organize virtually our entire lives to attaining that thing. Lust also involves materialism, especially here in America, and in immigrant families where the goal is to get what America has. Make no mistake: When you see the respect and large salaries of a doctor or certain businesspersons. So you concur with the voice of sin and go in for it, putting the blinders on and shooting for the glory for yourself, no matter how this affects other people.

### **Present Yourselves to God: v.13**

How then do we reverse this life course? How can we stop listening to these lusts? By offering the members of our body to God, for Him to use for His love and glory. Look at v.13: '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.' Verse 13 is very poetic. Notice that there is a direct comparison. You can offer the members of your body to sin. Or you can offer yourselves to God AS WELL AS your members to God.

It seems to me that if you are truly joined to Jesus, you cannot offer YOURSELVES to sin, you can only offer YOURSELVES to God.<sup>2</sup> This is very important to recognize. Your fundamental core identity is safely and solidly united with Christ, and sin cannot touch you. The members of your body can be influenced by sin, however unfortunate, but the core 'me,' the essence of who I am, is joined with Jesus. That's a great foundation. So often we think, 'Well, I used to be a good Christian, but then we went too far physically. What a sinner I am.' Or maybe it's, 'I can't control my temper because that's just who I am. I can't separate that from myself.' But you're confusing issues. Our sins do not define who we are, and we are not trapped in them. Our mistakes do not characterize us and we are not doomed to repeat them. The core of who we are is identified with Jesus Christ. We are dead to sin and alive to God in that very deep place in us. The victory already belongs to Jesus Christ in us, and now the skirmishes between sin and the Spirit need to be fought in the rest of our bodies.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, we are the ones who choose which side our hands and feet and the rest of our members will fight for. Notice here that Paul says that these things are YOUR members. They do not belong to someone else. They belong to you, and the question now is: What will you do with them? Who will they serve? Your members will be used either by sin, which will turn them into instruments of unrighteousness, or by the Spirit within you, who will turn them into instruments of righteousness. Unfortunately, what we've known for most of our lives is to use our hands, feet, voice for self-centeredness because we've listened to its lusts for so long. The choice of Paul's verbs reveals this. He says, 'Do not go on presenting,' which implies the ongoing past habit of presenting our members to sin.

This language Paul is using has military terms in it. The word 'present' in the command, 'Do not go on presenting your members,' means 'do not place beside, or put at someone's disposal.' The image here is of us turning over our members either to the notorious and corrupt guerilla warrior Sin, or our great King who is healing humanity with goodness, God. And the word 'instruments' seems to mean 'instruments of warfare, or weapons.' I think Paul is using a military metaphor here, designating our bodies as the first place of spiritual warfare between sin and the

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<sup>2</sup> We might ask whether this presenting of ourselves is a one time thing. I think it primarily is, but that it is a commitment that is renewed daily or even continually. In fact, I think we need to do this in order to remind ourselves of our deadness to sin and our complete availability to God. But these reaffirmations serve to confirm the strength of the original choice of turning to Jesus Christ by faith, whereby we reckoned him to be Lord of our lives, totally sold out to him so that he could live out his great life through us.

<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed when we skip ahead and look at Romans 7, where Paul distinguishes between the 'I myself,' his core identity that is united with Christ by the Spirit, and 'the flesh,' his lingering self-motivated life apart from God. The 'I myself' serves the law of God in the mind, while 'the flesh' serves the law of sin. The important fact is that our core identity is in agreement and unity with God.

Spirit. Sometimes we speak of parts of our body as weapons. For example, we say, 'His tongue cuts like a razor,' or, 'She just exploded.' That's how our tongue or other members used to serve as weapons of unrighteousness. While that may have been true back then, now do something different. 'Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.' Once again, the meaning is, 'But now, put yourself in the disposal of God, present yourselves to God.' And the verb tenses indicate that this is the exciting choice we can make that we were not able to make before we came to Christ. This is far more than a choice, however. It is a command. **PRESENT YOURSELVES TO GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART!!!**<sup>4</sup>

Illus: A few years ago, soon after my wife and I bought our house, we decided that we needed to reach out better to the black youth in our neighborhood. We and our housemates had tried different things, including having kids' bible club, outdoor bbq's, and inviting people over for dinner. But it was still hard to just get to know people, especially the older youth because they didn't think we were fun. At the same time, we saw them smoking pot. So we turned our brains over to the Lord and asked for wisdom. After some talking and praying, we decided to redo our basement. We gave our money to God, and had some plumbing and heating redone. We gave our hands to God, and put up walls, painted the walls, painted the floor, and decorated the room. That was a challenge for me because I had never really done construction projects, but the Lord took my hands and used them. Then we gave our voices to God: We told some people what we were doing, and they donated a TV, a VCR, an entertainment center bookcase, games, a table, and a stereo. We got a foosball table and a karaoke system. Then we let youth in our neighborhood know that they were welcome to come over for homework help and games. We worked out a schedule, and our housemate Leslie especially was available in the evenings. As a result, Leslie developed such good friendships with these kids that she took 4 – 5 teenage boys with her to CCFC every week for about 4 months! Now I learned that I wasn't used to giving my house, my money, my hands and voice to God in this way. But when I offered them to Him, He used them. That is similar to what I'm offering you. I will give out four \$50 grants to some of you who use your minds and creativity to think of the best ways to have fun as an alternative to the party scene here at BC.

This verse helps us prioritize the essence of the Christian life. Second only to knowing our identity as a child of God because we are joined to Jesus the Son of God (Rom.6:1 – 11), our number two priority is to present ourselves and the rest of us to God (Rom.6:12 – 14, see also 6:15 – 23). Remember that the way God is healing this world, and restoring human beings to the dreams He put in us in the first place – the dream of love, the dream of meaning, the dream of justice – is to bring people to Jesus to heal them and make them new. So often we think that's just some side little thing that God is doing. No! It's the main thing He's doing in this world. And so often we try to compartmentalize and boil down a relationship with Jesus and the mission of Jesus and all the profound implications down into ridiculous little lists.

Illus: I was just talking with a friend of mine, a Haitian woman named Elizabeth, about how God used her voice. While she was a student at Wellesley, she went abroad to Paris for a semester. She loved it. Except that there was a racial stereotype. Her host mother, a Christian woman, thought that because Elizabeth is black, she could sing gospel songs. This woman said, 'I'm going to tell the priest at the Catholic church and we'll do a concert.' Elizabeth said, 'No! I can't sing that well.' But the woman went and told the priest anyway. The priest said, 'Great! Let's do a gospel concert!' Elizabeth said, 'But I can't...' I guess they thought she was being modest, so they went ahead and planned it. Elizabeth felt, though, that the Lord said, 'Go ahead. Say yes. I'll back you up.' So she did. But she asked the Lord to help her. That week, she ran into a Wellesley classmate in Aix-en-Provence, France. 'Margaret?' 'Elizabeth?' And Margaret knew how to direct a gospel choir. So together, they gathered volunteers, they invited people from the community, and they had a short but rocking gospel concert in a French Catholic church, and Elizabeth got a chance to explain not only gospel music but the gospel – the great news – of Jesus himself. She offered God her voice, and He used it!

Our life revolves around Him, not around anything else. To put this into practice, when you get up in the morning, you can get in the shower and say a simply prayer, 'Please use me today, Lord. Live your life out through me.' Then be prepared to watch Jesus Christ step off the pages of history and into our world through you. **IT DOES HAPPEN!** We'll talk more about that in coming weeks. George Muller's hands are a perfect example of that. *Your* hands are next, as are *your* feet, *your* eyes, *your* voice.

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<sup>4</sup> Looking ahead to Romans 12:1 – 2, we find that Paul's response to God's faithfulness and power is once again, 'Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.' After declaring some of the magnificent truths about God's salvation history, Paul immediately steps in and offers the personal and practical theology of presenting ourselves to God.

### **Under God's Grace, not Law: v.14**

Just when we thought we understood the text, Paul throws us a curveball in v.14. He says, 'For sin shall not be master over you.' That part we can understand. But then he adds, 'For you are not under law, but under grace.' Okay, what does that mean and why does he say that here? Today we watched Barack Obama replace George W. Bush in the White House. We had a change of administration. We were 'under' Bush. Now we are 'under' Obama. Now I don't want to make more of this parallel than this: Under Bush, there was a program called No Child Left Behind, where teachers and students were held to standards but there was no funding for it. So it was a decent idea, but with no resources. Obama wants to actually fund education programs to support teachers and schools.

Similarly, the first and main issue is the issue of empowerment. Being 'under Law' means being informed of what is right and wrong, but having no real resources or power to live that way over the long haul. In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites had the Law of God, but they didn't have the grace of Jesus in them. But now, both Jews and Gentiles have access to the Spirit of Jesus, who lived in such a powerful way that he overcame sin in his own body. Remember that 'grace' or 'charis' means power or strength. In this case, he gives us his strength, his resources. He'll back us.

Illus: I want to close with an illustration about a woman who also gave her life and her hand to the Lord. During World War II, on February 28, 1944, Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie were arrested for housing Jews in their home in Holland. They were taken eventually to Ravensbrück, a prison camp in Germany where they were treated horribly. Corrie watched labor camp guards strike Betsie for being too weak to shovel. Betsie later died. Corrie was discharged in 1945, and she began to share all over Holland, Europe, and the United States what God had done in those dark days. Then, she went to Germany, and this is what she writes in *The Hiding Place*:

'It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbrück. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there--the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. 'How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,' he said. 'To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!'

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

This is what it means to be under grace: That God Himself supplies all the strength we need when we present ourselves to Him. He lives in us by His Spirit, and we need only yield to Him. He will do the rest.