

The Reign of Sin

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- [0 : 00] Romans 6 verses 12 through 14. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.
- ! 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.
- For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for your word this morning to remind us of who's truly in control, who's in charge, who has dominion.
- May you remind us as those who trust in Christ that you rule over all things, even in our lives now.
- And Father, we thank you for your word and may it speak to us this morning. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Have you ever found yourself wondering, how did I get to this place?
- [1 : 10] What decisions did I make that led me to where I am right now? Whether it's a series of mistakes that I've made or good decisions. I've made a good decision here and a little decision here.
- And all along the way, and I've arrived at this spot, I found myself reading those words to my kids. But not asking them of myself, but reading from Mr. Toad.
- You see, Mr. Toad had gotten to this spot, in this position, because of decisions he had made. He had lost his ancestral home, Toad Hall, because of bad decisions.
- And now he found himself without a home and overrun by varmints, weasels to be in fact. His story is a winding path through a train of escape, evading the police, jumping off of a train, wrecking a number of cars, and then alienating his friends.
- And then finally, crashing that car at the bottom of the lake and losing a home, and dressing up like a woman, and all these things, cascading effects of all these bad decisions.
- [2 : 24] He had made them, and then now he found himself in a spot where he asked, How did I get here? What did I do to find myself without a home?
- You see, despite all the best efforts of his friends, he found himself drawn back in to his one singular obsession.
- Cars. Motor cars. It reads like this, the story of the wind in the willows. It says, Toad, halfway through his meal, heard a familiar sound.
- He trembled with joy. It was the sound of a motor car. He heard it stop. The inn's doors opened, and as he sat, he saw the car's passengers entered in, talkative and happy.
- Toad slipped out quietly. There can't be any harm, he said to himself. And just looking at it, he inspected it carefully, and then his eyes lit up.
- [3 : 20] I wonder, he whispered, I wonder if this sort of car starts easily. And before he knew it, he was cranking the handle, and pop, pop, pop went the car.

And once again, Toad was possessed, as if in a dream, and he found himself in the driver's seat. He swung the car on the road, and faster and faster it went.

And as the car devoured the highway, Toad felt large, and again, he was Toad the Terror. Toad was consumed by driving cars, and he had wrecked a number of cars, and squandered his inheritance, and even lost his home, because he was consumed with driving.

And his friends intervened, and held him hostage in his own home, saying, Toad, you can't drive anymore, you're going to hurt yourself or others. And then he snuck out.

And then he found himself in jail, and then he broke free, and then he lost his home, because he was devoured by his obsession with driving. That seems really silly, that he's unable to restrain himself about driving.

[4 : 27] You see, sin had made him a slave, reigning over every part of his life. Driving had consumed him. That seems really silly, but we do the same thing.

This children's story reminds us that sin consumes all of our lives, and reigns over all of us. Fairytale toads and humans alike.

The reign of sin is not just an automobile obsession. It has its claws in all of us. It can be pretty innocuous, whether it's, you know, touching the car, turning the crank on the handle, you know, an old-timey car, that's how you started it, putting your key in the ignition, or thinking to yourself, I wonder what it sounds like.

I wonder what it's like to sit in the seat and grab the steering wheel. It's pretty innocuous, right? Doesn't everyone think well of themselves before others?

I spoke to that person in that way because, you know, that's how they act. It begins subtly, and then it cascades into something different, when our love of good food never stops, not when we're full, but we just keep eating.

[5 : 44] Maybe our allegiance to alcohol drives out everything else in our lives. Our security is not in the one who is sovereign, but in all these nice and neat boxes that we create for our lives and ourselves and our children.

I will never feel afraid because I've controlled everything. I will never risk anything. Uncertainty? Because I control it with my job, my life, and my home.

What about health? Above all else. Order, organization, cleanliness, sex, power, money, relationships, toys at Christmastime, Christmas presents, or the perfect holiday party.

It starts with just a little, I wonder what it sounds like. I wonder what it feels like, and yet it lurks in everything.

Sin reigns in the hearts of men, and it might look different for each and every one of us. It might be large and flagrant and find us in prison. It might be socially unacceptable.

[6 : 58] It might land us in jail, or it might rot us from the inside out, so that the aroma of the good news of the gospel isn't present for our children, isn't present for our neighbors.

It never comes to bloom, and instead, we're seen as nasty and disgusting because we allow sin to reign.

You see, sin reigns in all of us, in all of mankind, but it doesn't reign anymore for those who are in Christ. That's the argument Paul is making here. The gospel has broken the reign of sin, and we're free from it, and that's part of the problem because we know deep down as we leave this place that we will still sin, and so what do we do with it?

Matthew's talked at length about this threefold aspect of sin, the power, the penalty, and the presence of sin. The presence of sin still remains, so how does it not reign over us?

That's the question for the Christian, and that's the question that Paul is addressing in verses 12 through 14. How does sin reign, or does it reign, in the life of the Christian?

- [8 : 16] First, we're going to look at these three verses in a series. A command, a continuation of that argument, or continuation of that command, and then the cause of that command.
- First, the command. So look with me at verse 12. Often Christians come to verse 12, and we forget what's happened in verses 1 through 11.
- Paul's reminded us, as we heard last week, that we are dead to sin, but alive in Jesus Christ, and we struggle because we know that we still have sin, so how is it dead if I still know that it's there?
- But that all-consuming nature, that reign of sin, Paul says, is broken. That's why he can say in verse 12, let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passion.
- Now, is he saying that sin is still reigning? It seems like if he's saying that, he's talking out of both sides of his mouth. He's saying, be free from sin, and don't let it reign, but yet it still reigns.
- [9 : 23] That you're dead to sin, but it's still, you're free from it? How does that work out? That would be a contradiction if he said that. He's saying this in this command. Do not let it reign any longer.
- Do not let it reign in your mortal body. If you were to say this to someone who didn't have faith in Christ, it would kind of be unfair, wouldn't it? He's saying to someone who's dead in sin that can't rise up and walk to not let it reign, even though we know it reaches every corner of their heart.
- He's talking very specifically to a Christian that is dead to sin, as verse 11 tells us, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. He's saying it cannot reign in the sense of its power and its penalty like it once did.
- The Christian is free from that reign of sin. And the only reason Paul can command this, the only reason he can give it as an imperative, kids, if you remember in English, an imperative is saying something like do this.
- He's saying don't let it reign. And he can say that because of verse 14, which we'll come to in a minute. It's an indicative, something that's done for you. So this command is to Christians saying, do not let sin win, do not let sin reign like it once did.
- [10 : 48] All of this is a command wrapped up to Christians. If you think about where we are in the book of Romans, we spent a number of weeks, months, leading up to this point.
- This is the first time Paul is saying to his audience, do this. So it's all these weeks and verses and chapters of what has been done on their behalf, that God has met them in their sin, that God has given them salvation.
- All of these things, all of this has been done for the Christian and now Paul is saying to them, do not let sin reign any longer. It's the first time he gives a command in the book of Romans for them to follow.
- The interesting part though is this nuance that he says. He says, let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body. He's pointing out that Christians are both body and soul.
- He's not saying we're divided beings where our body does one thing and our soul does another. We are together. But he's testifying to the reality that we're caught up in something.
- [11 : 53] It's something that we've talked about in the weeks past that we live in this overlap of already, the fact that we're united with Christ as we heard a couple weeks ago, we're united with Christ in faith, that's what's already happened.
- And then not yet. We don't yet have our glorified bodies. So not everything is perfect. There's a sense in which we live in that overlap. We're not yet in the fully glorified bodies.

And so, our mortal bodies remain and sin still affects it. But the command is to stand firm and not let it reign. Now, I warned Matthew I was going to do this, this quote, a heretic.

All right? Now, it's interesting in the life of heretics where they agree with those that are faithful. And Augustine, as we've, we've kind of talked about Augustine as we've walked through Romans in original sin.

And Augustine championed this idea. He was an early church father and his main bad guy opponent was this guy called Pelagius. But when they come to this verse, they both agree about this.

[13 : 01] Pelagius said that sin reigns by obedience and consent. That means the sinner consents and allows it to have reign over the sinner.

The sinner that is still having faith in Christ. Augustine agreed with him and said, we still have desires but by not obeying them, we don't let sin reign in our members.

We don't let sin reign over us if we have faith in Christ. These two opponents, one heretic, one faithful, agree about the fact, agree with Paul in saying that we consent to it.

Paul is challenging us to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. We can't let it go on any longer because when we do consent, we allow it to remain.

We allow it to reign even still. Now the language throughout this verse is one of obedience and reign. It's very kingly. It's a unique idea for us as Americans. We don't like anyone telling us what to do but a king rules over all things and rules and directs his subjects.

[14 : 12] If we think about what we've heard thus far in Romans in chapter 5, Paul talks about the reign and this reversal of a reign. For if because one man's trespass, death reigned through one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in the life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Is the king Jesus or is the king sin? Sin cannot reign over the Christian. This idea of having a king that rules over us, forcing its subject to obey whether it's towed with the motor car or whether it's us and rooting out sin.

That king directs his subjects. The same could be true of a Christian that allows sin to come into their life and doesn't actively work against it but instead allows it to go unchallenged.

That it controls all of its interests. And that's why they find themselves asking or why we might find ourselves asking, how did I get to this spot?

How did I get so low? There's a man that I've been sharing the gospel with over a series of years really and he made some decisions in his life that landed him in jail and as I met with him in jail he was brought to the point of tears because he had lost his career.

[15 : 41] He thought he had lost his family. He had for a time and he kept asking how did I get here? And I reminded him that in that moment the decision that he made to land him in jail had begun long, long ago many, many years ago to allow sin to go unchecked in his life and think oh it's not that big of a deal.

It's just touching the steering wheel. It's just wondering how the car sounded. But instead that decision those decisions over a period of time land us very far away from home and asking ourselves how did I get there?

Christian the command is to us to not let sin reign. We cannot let it reign in our lives and we must root it out. Paul continues this idea through a continuation of this argument a continuation of this command.

Let's turn our attention to verse 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.

So often we talked about this in Sunday school today Paul makes an argument and then he advances that argument or he clarifies or he applies it. He's doing the same thing here.

[17 : 07] He's kind of circling back and providing more context to what he means in verse 12. He pivots from this analogy of a king and reigning and subjects to forces that slavishly do his bidding but it's not immediately obvious what he pivots to.

It's not slaves and a king it's not subjects but he says this do not present your members or do not allow your members as instruments is often what your Bible might say but the instrument here is like a weapon of warfare.

So he's saying do not let your members be weapons in unrighteousness of unrighteousness. Members is not members of the body of Christ like members that we've just received but all your faculties as a Christian your body your will all of those things that make up who we are.

Do not allow your body do not allow your will do not allow yourself to sin do not let them be instruments of this grand plan this grand army of evil and when he says that he's reminding us that sin cannot be our captain or our general to order us to go this way or that or allow us to be ones set under sin's authority.

no our members are instead to be obedient to God. That's the reverse of what he says but before he says that he reminds us of this status not as members or slaves or members of this other army to go and do sin but we are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 53] He reminds us of this source of power is the spirit working in us to change us to bring us from death to life. We're not left alone depending on our own works and our own efforts that we're called to be abounding in good works and to do all those things but God has equipped us with the spirit that's changed us that's brought us from death to life.

He is doing that in us. Paul will write this later in Romans that a Christian is called to present your body as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God.

That's a snapshot. This is a snapshot of what's to come in Romans 12 that our mortal bodies though we may struggle against sin that there should be a longing for good and right that we're being dragged down by our bodies because we live in this overlap where we have a body of this world and it's not yet glorified and that our members can't get with its program.

If we walk a day as a Christian we know that struggle and Paul uses this picture of a king and its subjects for us to remind us of how serious it is and how pervasive it is and how he can use evil can use us as a weapon of unrighteousness and these soldiers have taken off the uniform of one army and put on the colors of another.

There's a famous British scholar that said this about this idea that's armies and sin that sin is regarded as a sovereign so a king who demands military service of subjects and leaves their quota of arms and gives them their soldiers pay of death.

[20 : 48] Do we really believe that? Do we really believe that sin merits death? And sin is no longer for the Christian at the head of the army in which you serve but instead we're serving in God's army.

So what are we supposed to do with this transition from unrighteousness to righteousness? What are we supposed to do with the fact that sin still remains and if we're honest it often feels like it controls every aspect of our life.

We're told not to do this but as we walk out these doors we definitely feel like this is true. The Puritan John Owen said this.

He said something like this be killing sin or it be killing you. It's this idea that there's a binary nature in this fight against sin. It's either a zero or a one and we have to be killing sin or it will be destroying us.

That idea comes from this little book he wrote called The Mortification of Sin. It's the great Christian duty he writes not to be embarrassed by sin but to be killing it in every area of our lives.

[22 : 02] Not your neighbor's sin not your friend's sin not your mom's sin or your dad's sin not the sin that's out there but your own inside of you. That's what not letting sin reign means.

It's rooting it out bringing it to the life to the light so that we can kill it. What's in view here is this idea of sanctification the idea that we're becoming more and more holy be ye holy is the charge in the Old Testament and the duties that are required in that are hunting it out and rooting it out.

Now that seems like a really big task to not let your enemy gain an inch of ground in your life to not be like toad and just want to know what it feels like or sounds like to not let a look linger to not let a drop of a hint of gossip reign in your life to not just cheat a little bit pretending like it's an honest mistake.

This feels weighty because this is the great Christian task is to kill sin because we want to be like Christ but God doesn't leave us to do that on our own.

God fuels us with his spirit. He is the one that made us dead to sin and alive to God but often we feel like we should just give up.

[23 : 35] Right? That's a struggle in the beginning of Romans 6. Why does this all matter if we're covered by grace anyway? How can I do this because this feels hard and yes it goes well at times but often it feels like I'm losing this battle.

You are still called to fight in this battle no matter our age or no matter if we are a second from glory or that's long in the future that we are called to fight.

A Christian that doesn't care about sin in his own life doesn't really understand the gospel we have to remind ourselves to never give up but know that we will sometimes lose in this fight against sin.

It still rages that battle still rages in our hearts. Now as we do that we can sometimes do this in a way that is really sad right?

Because we feel and know in our bones that we've grieved a holy God. We can do this in a way that is kind of not fun to be around to be real frank but we are called to do so with joy.

[24 : 43] David says this restore to me the joy of your salvation. We should execute all of this with joy. We should be rooting out sin knowing that joy comes from the gospel and that joy infuses everything that we do even killing our own sin.

That seems really weird but that's what we're called to. The shorter catechism tells us this that if we're becoming more and more holy and as we're being renewed that if we're becoming more and more like Christ that is the thing that should produce joy in our hearts that we can see in one another and in ourselves maybe not today maybe not next week but after years and know God is at work and that should make us joyful.

John Owen describes this process like a forest. The forest is overcome with vines and branches and as we walk and we root out sin and become more holy year after year those branches and vines that cover the forest floor become less and less and the light comes through and those trees either remain but there's less and less undergrowth.

If we think about our Christian lives are we rooting out sin so that we can see glimpses of light maybe not this week but maybe last year compared to last year maybe in years after walking with Christ are we seeing more and more light are we reminding ourselves that we're not doing this on our own effort but God who made us alive in Christ Jesus by the power of his spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives and reigns and works in us to do so.

God has not simply left us alone for this task but he's equipped us for it. That's the command to be holy to root out sin not let it rain and continuing saying our members are not used for unrighteousness and this weapon against and this war but weapons towards righteousness and fueled by the Holy Spirit but why what's the cause of that wait Paul are you saying we have to do these things I thought you said that there are great promises that it's all been done for me yes look at verse 14 for sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace the law requires holiness we know that but man in his sin was powerless to do anything powerless to fulfill its demands we note that from experience living in this life but the game has changed now we are fueled by the

[27 : 43] Holy Spirit a Christian can be holy because he's equipped to be holy that God has given us his spirit this idea of being under law or under grace is not talking about being under the Old Testament or Moses or the New Testament he's saying are you living under the power of the law are you living under the reign of sin are you living under the promises of the gospel of grace it's talking about the controlling force in our lives the dominion of sin is the rule and reign either of law or of grace but we know as a Christian that that rule being under the law has been broken and now it's under grace and he can issue this command because of what has been done on our behalf we talked about the imperative of a command do this this is very much indicative this has been done for you that is the truth of the gospel if we get those confused then we confuse the nature of the gospel we don't do the gospel it has been done for us it has been done on our behalf

Christ has made you alive Christ has moved you from under law to under grace the spirit has opened your eyes all those things have been done on our behalf and as we think about that in our fight against holiness we have to remember that the great anglican bishop j.c.

ryle who i know some of us are working through his work said this that faith in christ is the root of all holiness the first step towards a holy life is to believe on christ that until we believe we have not a jot of holiness and that union with christ that's an idea that we talked about a couple weeks ago is the secret to both beginning to be holy and continuing to be holy the command to holiness begins with faith in jesus christ we can't forget that it's not as if we're told to go do this and we're left to our own devices we have to understand that god sending his son in the form of man as god and paying the penalty for our sin is the engine it is the thing that gives us life it is the thing that allows us to be holy that's why paul can say to the roman church be holy because christ has died for sin christ has done that work for each and every one of us he's called us to faith because you could never do it you were never able to save yourself you're never able to be holy of your own accord because sin reigned in your members but christian you have been set free from that free from the reign of sin so we must put our hope in christ because that is the beginning of holiness now this morning and this week will we remember to not let sin reign for christ reigns for us let's pray lord we're thankful for the reminder this morning that you reign in the life of the christian father may you work faith in our hearts so that we would transform that we would be changed that we would grow in holiness because of what you have done in our hearts that there is no dominion now of sin in our lives but father we still struggle against its presence in our lives and may you equip us for this task we pray in jesus name amen let's stand and sing in response to god's word do