Lesson 60 at StudyRomans.org

Handout for Lesson 60

The Handout for Lesson 60 shows the oldest surviving copy of the verses from Romans 6 that we are now studying. As you can see, about half of the papyrus sheet is missing, leaving only about half of each line. The yellow highlights show the text that remains, both in the original Greek and in English. The text in brackets is the text that has disintegrated in this particular ancient copy.

What is the date of this document? Opinions differ on that question. The earliest proposed date that I found is late in the first century, during the reign of Emperor Domitian, but others date it in the second century or even the third century. If the earliest proposal is correct, then this copy of Romans was penned within 30 or 40 years of Paul's original letter! But, given that this papyrus was discovered in Egypt, most sources lean toward a later date.

If you want to read more about this and other such ancient copies of the New Testament, you can refer to a two-volume work entitled "The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts" by Comfort and Barrett. The discussion of Papyrus 46 starts on page 183 of Volume 1, and their proposed date is the early to middle second century.

Most of the papyrus copies of the Bible disintegrated long ago. So how can we be sure that the copy we have today is the same as the copy that Paul wrote? The first answer is that we can trust the providence of God in accurately preserving his word, but we can also point to the process by which his word was preserved.

This book, for example, states that "the scribe who produced this manuscript used an early, excellent" copy of Romans (which we no longer have). And that, of course, is one reason why we can be confident in the text that we now have — not that we can find some early partial copy of the text such as this one, but rather that we can show that the later complete copies that we have today can be traced back through a chain of accurate copies to the original autograph copy of Paul's letter.

Romans 6:12, Continued

> **Romans 6:12** — Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

To begin, let's remember what we read a few lessons ago from a Calvinist commentator. He said that when we are saved, the Holy Spirit performs some sort of spiritual surgery on us so that it becomes mechanically impossible for us to habitually sin. Is that what we see here in verse 12? Not at all. Verse 12 teaches the opposite of what Calvinism teaches.

Paul is talking to Christians in verse 12. He is still talking to "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus" (verse 3). And so, if it is mechanically impossible for saved people to habitually sin after they are saved, then why does Paul tell saved people not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies? Why command me not to do something that is impossible for me to do?

Clearly, if Paul is telling saved people not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies, then it is possible for sin to reign in the mortal body of someone who has been saved.

But we do have at least two questions. First, why does Paul mention our "mortal body"? And second, why does Paul say that sin **makes** you obey its passions?

Our mortal body is our body of flesh that is subject to death and decay. Yes, we are a new creation after our baptism, but that new creation is still housed in a mortal body. Paul tells us much more about that elsewhere.

> **2 Corinthians 5:4** — For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened — not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is **mortal** may be swallowed up by life.

> **1 Corinthians 15:53-54** — For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this **mortal** body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the **mortal** puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Paul does something in verse 12 that he also does elsewhere in this same chapter — he personifies sin. Back in verse 6, sin was a slave-master. Later in verse 23, sin will be an employer. But here in verse 12, Paul depicts sin as a king who rules in the human body. And, as with any king, this king issues commands to his subjects to make them do things.

Sin wants our human bodies to do what he tells them to do. And that is the struggle that every Christian faces. Yes, we die to sin at our baptism, and yes, we are raised to walk in newness of life, but even so we struggle with sin every day of our lives in these mortal bodies. Paul frequently talks about our continuing struggle with sin.

> **Galatians 5:16-17** — But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

> **Colossians 3:5-8** — Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Those verses are describing the daily struggle with sin that is faced by every Christian. We are not to gratify those desires of the flesh. We are to put to death what is earthly in us. We must put away all such things. That is our daily struggle.

Here in verse 12, Paul describes that same struggle in terms of sin wanting to reign in our mortal bodies — something that we must not allow to happen.

Sin lost us when we were saved, but sin wants us back. The temptation to sin does not go away when we are saved. Sin wants to be our master again, but we must not let it. Before we were saved, we were faithful to sin and rebellious against Christ. But now, after we are saved, we must be faithful to Christ and rebellious against sin.

What Paul is teaching here is the exact opposite of what his critics were accusing him of teaching back in verse 1. Rather than teaching that we should just let sin have its way in our mortal bodies, Paul says

that we must not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. Rather than sinning more and more, we must sin less and less.

Let's also look at the word "make" in verse 12. Paul pictures this tyrant of sin as **making** us sin — as making us obey its passions. And, no, that word "make" does not mean that sin overcomes our free will. We may sometimes excuse our actions by saying that the devil made us do it, but, while the devil may tempt us to do it, the choice to do it is always our own choice. The devil tempts us to sin, but the devil does not compel us to sin. And how do we know that? We know that because if we lack free will to do some action, then we cannot be held accountable for that action. If we are held accountable for the bad choices we make, then we must have been free to make the right choices.

> **James 1:14-15** — But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

> **James 4:7** — Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

> **1 Corinthians 10:13** — No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

> **Romans 14:12** — So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Confusion on this point sometimes leads to a mistaken view about prophecy. For example, we sometimes hear that Peter or Judas should not really be faulted for what they did because they were both prophe-

sied to do what they did. That is a completely wrong view of prophecy. That God knows ahead of time what choice someone will make in a particular situation does not mean that their choice was not freely made and does not remove the accountability for their choice. Remember, God created us, and God knows us better than we know ourselves.

And one more point: that God knows ahead of time **some** of the free will choices we will make does not mean that God knows ahead of time **every** free will choice we will make. God knows everything that is knowable, but the Bible suggests that some of our free will choices may not be knowable ahead of time. For example, when it came to his own people deciding to burn their own children as sacrifices to Molech, God said in Jeremiah 7:31 that such a thing had never entered his mind. And, yes, this is a complicated topic, but it is also a topic that we spent three entire lessons studying in detail when we looked at Joel 2:14 in Lessons 16-18 on Joel.

Does God ever experience regret? Does God ever change his mind? Does God ever learn something? Calvinists would answer "no" to all three questions, but what does the Bible say? Don't we see regret at the time of the flood? Don't we see God changing his mind when it comes to King Hezekiah? Don't we see God learning something when he says to Abraham, "Now I know"?

As with any complicated topic, the first thing we should do is read all that the Bible has to say on the subject — and I tried to collect all of those verses in the Handout for Lesson 15 of our earlier study of Joel. (See StudyJoel.com!) We will have more to say on this subject later when we get to Romans 9-11.

Back to verse 12, I think we can say that the word "make" is just part of how Paul is personifying sin. Sin is a ruler who (like most rulers) issues commands to make us do what he wants us to do. But the choice to do it remains with us. Sin does not **compel** us to do what is wrong any more than God **compels** us to do what is right. In each case, the choice is ours — and that is why we are held accountable for that choice.

And how do we know that for sure? One reason we know that for sure is because of what Paul had already told us.

> **Romans 2:9-10** — There will be tribulation and distress for every human being **who does evil**, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone **who does good**, the Jew first and also the Greek.

And we also know that for sure because of what Paul is telling us right here in verse 12 — he is telling us not to do what sin wants us to do! Paul is telling us right here that we have the free choice to obey sin or to disobey sin — and Paul is telling us which choice to make. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions." Sin is commanding us to do one thing while God is commanding us to do another thing. But the choice is ours. We can choose to obey God or we can choose to obey sin.

Romans 6:13

> **Romans 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.

In verse 12, Paul told us not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies, and here in verse 13, Paul tells us not to "present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness." What does that mean?

The Greek word "member" refers to a part of the body. Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 12:14-20 where he talks about the foot, the hand, the ear, and the eye as members of the body. And I think the meaning is the same here in verse 13. Paul is telling us not to present the various parts of our mortal bodies to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.

And how do we do that? We do that when we use our eyes to look at something that we should not look at. We do that when we use our ears to listen to something that we should not listen to. We do that when we use our feet and our hands to go somewhere we shouldn't go or to do something we shouldn't do. We do that when we use our tongues to say something that we shouldn't say. I think we all know what Paul means here.

And what should we do instead? We should present ourselves to God instead of presenting ourselves to sin. We should use the members of our body as instruments for righteousness rather than as instruments for unrighteousness. And, again, I think we all know what that means. Paul will say the same thing again later in this letter.

> **Romans 13:14** — But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

And, again, we need to remember that Paul is still answering that question back in verse 1. Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Absolutely not! We should instead present every part of our body to God for use as an instrument of righteousness.

We once presented ourselves to sin when we were slaves to sin. But we have been set free from that slavery to sin. Instead, as Paul will tell us in verse 18, we are now slaves to righteousness. And so, rather than presenting our bodies to do what sin commands us to do, we must now present our bodies to do what God commands us to do.

Before we leave verse 13, let's pause and look at what Paul tells us in the middle of that verse — he says that we "have been brought from death to life." What does that mean?

What that means is that Paul has not changed the subject from verse 3. He is still talking about baptism. He is still using our baptism as the basis for why we must not continue in sin. We were brought from death to life when we were baptized into death and raised from that watery grave. We were buried in baptism, and we were raised to walk in newness of life. It was at the moment of our baptism that God brought us from death to life, and not a moment before.

And that is why we present ourselves to God. That is what Paul is saying here. "Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life." Once again, Paul is pointing to our baptism to answer the question in verse 1. "Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" God forbid! You were baptized! You were brought from death to life by God! And so you must obey God and not obey sin.

Sin killed you, but God gave you your life back. So whom are you going to obey? The one who killed you or the one who gave you life?

And what will happen when we obey God with the members of our body? What will happen when we present ourselves to God as instru-

ments for righteousness? What will happen is that people will see Jesus living in us. That is what Paul tells us elsewhere.

> **2 Corinthians 4:11** — For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Rather than letting sin reign in our mortal bodies, we should be manifesting the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh. And that is impossible if we are sinning more and more! Jesus committed no sin, and so whenever we are sinning we can be certain that we are **not** manifesting the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh. So if we want people to see Jesus living in us more and more, then we must sin less and less.

Romans 6:14

> **Romans 6:14** — For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The first word in verse 14 tells us that this verse is explaining the previous verse. The previous verse told us not to present ourselves to sin but rather to present ourselves to God. Why? Verse 14 answers that question.

The reason why we must present ourselves to God rather than present ourselves to sin is that sin will have no dominion over us since we are not under law but under grace. That is the explanation in verse 14 for the command in verse 13. But what does the explanation mean?

First, why do we see the future tense in Paul's explanation? Why does Paul say that "sin **will** have no dominion over you" rather than say that sin does not have dominion over you?

I think the answer is simple — Paul wants us to notice something about the timing. It has not always been the case that sin did not have dominion over us. We started out that way as infants, but once we sinned, then sin most certainly did have dominion over us. That is why we were lost. That is why Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

But then at some point in time, that all changed for a Christian. At some point in time, sin no longer had dominion over us. When? When did that change occur?

Even before we answer that question, can't we say from this verse that it must have been some definite point in time? Can't we say that it couldn't have been some sort of a gradual process? After all, how can sin have just a little dominion over us? That is not how dominion works! Dominion is not a dimmer switch; dominion is an off-and-on switch. Either sin has dominion over you, or sin does not have dominion over you. Don't we see that here? Paul does not say here that sin will have less dominion over you; he says that sin will have no dominion over you.

And when did that change occur? When was that switch flipped? Hasn't Paul already told us that in about as many ways as it is possible to tell us? That change happened at our baptism, and not a moment before. That is when we died to sin. That is when we arose to walk in newness of life. Baptism is the switch! That is when the great change happens! That is when we can say that sin no longer has dominion over us.

So why the future verb tense here in verse 14? Because, while that new relationship with sin starts at our baptism, it does not end there. It continues into the future. Paul uses the future tense to give us as-

surance. We have a new master going forward, and that is not going to change. Yes, the switch was flipped, but it will not be flipped back. The old self is dead.

That future tense is grounded in a present reality. Isn't that what Paul says here in verse 14? Sin will have no dominion over you (an assurance of the future), since you are not under law but under grace (a present reality).

There is a great promise in verse 14. Yes, we were once slaves to sin. Yes, we were once under the dominion of sin. But Jesus redeemed us. Jesus bought us. We now belong to a new master, and he is not ever going to give us back to our old master.

But can I decide to go back on my own? Jesus won't give me back, but can I run away from him and go back to my old master? Jesus won't throw me out of the boat, but can I jump out of the boat?

The answer to that question goes to the heart of the difference between what Calvinism teaches and what the Bible teaches. And the answer is simple — unless God has taken away my free will, the answer must be yes. Yes, I can decide to turn my back on Jesus and go back to my old master. If I have free will, then I can make that free will choice. And is that surprising to anyone? Don't we all know people who have done just that?

And, again, we can find such a person in 2 Peter 2:20-22. That person, Peter tells us, has "escaped," but later has again become "entangled" and "overcome" so that his last state has become worse than his first state.

What was the first state of that person? His first state was that, after he sinned, he was lost. He was a sinner who had never obeyed the gospel of Christ. His old man had never been put to death. He had never been made a new creation. That was his first state.

And what was the second state of that person? He was a sinner who had become a new creation through his obedience to the gospel of Christ. His old man had died. He had been raised to walk in newness of life. But later he had turned his back on Jesus and had become faithless to God. That was his second state.

Does sin have dominion over that person in that second state? Well, that person is certainly acting as if it does. That person has certainly run back to that old master and that old life of slavery to sin. That person is certainly acting as if he is back in bondage to that old slave-master. He is certainly obeying his old master.

That is how he is acting, but is that how he really is? I don't think so. Yes, he may be obeying his old master, but that was his own choice. He was a freed slave who for whatever reason decided to go back to his old slave-master. All he needs to do to be back with his new master is to repent and return to a life of faithfulness.

This person in the second state described by Peter has already been baptized into Christ. The old self has already died. He is already a new creation. Sin has already lost its dominion over him. Jesus has already paid his ransom and bought him back. The only problem now is that this person by his own free will has made the choice to walk away from Jesus. Can he come back? Yes, he can, but doesn't need to be baptized again. Baptism kills the old man and creates the new man

— but those things have already happened for this person. What he needs to do is to repent and return to Jesus.

What do the Calvinists say about such a situation? What they usually say is that the person was never really saved in the first place. In short, the Calvinists try to rewrite history. They say his salvation was not genuine because if it were genuine he would never have left.

That's what they say, but is that what the Bible says? No, it is not. We just read it from 2 Peter 2. That person had **escaped** the defilements of the world! That was not a counterfeit salvation; that was a real salvation. And yet, that person later became **entangled** in those same defilements — that person escaped (was saved) and then went back to the world!

That is why Peter talks about a first state and a second state. People in both states are lost, but the solution to that problem is different for each. Those in the first state need to be baptized, while those in the second state (who have already been baptized) need to repent. And what if they don't? If they don't, they are both lost, but those in the second state are in a worse condition than those in the first state. How is it worse? The Bible does not tell us much about that, but the writer of Hebrews adds a bit to what Peter tells us.

> **Hebrews 10:26-27** — For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

And, of course, we have an example of this in the Bible. Look at Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. Was he saved? Acts 8:13 tells us that Simon be-

lieved and was baptized. A Calvinist would tell us that Simon didn't really believe — and yet the Bible tells us that he did believe. (The Bible says that Simon believed; Calvin tells us that Simon did not believe. I don't know about you, but I would be very suspicious of any system of theology that places the word "not" in front of what God tells us! Isn't that exactly what Satan did in the garden?)

And what happened to Simon the sorcerer after he believed and was baptized? He again became entangled in the world. We see that in Acts 8:18-19. And the result? We see that in Acts 8:20 — he was going to perish. And the solution? We see that in Acts 8:22 — he needed to repent. Peter did not tell Simon to be baptized again, but rather Peter told Simon to repent.

So where are we with regard to verse 14?

We know what it means for sin to no longer have dominion over us. It means that sin is no longer our slave master. Sin no longer has the power of death over us. Instead, we have been bought with a price. We now belong to someone else.

And we also know what it means to not be under law but under grace. Paul has been explaining that to us in great detail in these opening chapters of Romans. If we were under law, then the only way to God would be through flawless obedience to the law, which is not possible for us to do. But the system of faith does not depend on flawless obedience to the law. Instead, the system of faith depends on the free gift of God's grace. Law depends on something we do; grace depends on something God has done.

Romans 6:15

> **Romans 6:15** — What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Romans 6 started with a question. And after reading that question, we had a question of our own — where does Paul's answer to that question end? Based on verse 15, we have a definitive answer to that question — "not yet"!

Paul has not yet finished responding to the objection in verse 1, and we know that because Paul rephrases the objection here in verse 15. But while the objection is rephrased, Paul's answer is not — he once again answers, "By no means!" or "God forbid!"

And, again, what we see here is no doubt an actual objection that Paul had heard from the Jews that he had taught. Paul told them that the system of faith did not require flawless obedience to the law — and so how did they respond? Some of them, it seems, had responded by saying, "Well, if I can be saved apart from flawless obedience to the law, then I might as well just do whatever I want to do! If one flaw won't condemn me, then it must be true that a thousand flaws won't condemn me. So I guess we should just break the law more and more since we are not under law anymore. Grace will take care of everything."

That view of God's grace hasn't gone anywhere. The German poet and writer Heinrich Heine, on his deathbed in Paris in 1856, famously said, "God will forgive me; that's his business." And how many people today live the same way?