

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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Sermon Title: “Who Are You?”

Sermon Text: Romans 6:11-14

Rom. 6:11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Rom. 6:12 ¶ Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Rom. 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.

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

Main Point: The believer’s union with Christ calls for a fundamental reordering of our relationship to every thought, desire, and action that is contrary to God’s law.

Outline:

1. How to Think of Yourself (6:11)
2. How to Control Yourself (6:12)
3. How to Present Yourself (6:13)
4. Who Governs Yourself (6:14)

Introduction

Martin Luther very famously posted his 95 Theses against the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church in October of 1517. When this happened it sent shock waves through Germany, and so only a few months after he posted his 95 Theses Luther went to Heidelberg, Germany for a meeting of the Augustinian order (the monastic order he was a part of) where Luther debated among his fellow monks on the subject of the gospel. Today this is known as Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*. And in this disputation, Luther echoed something Paul has been saying so far in Romans:

“He is not righteous who *does* much, but he who, without work, *believes* much in Christ” (Thesis 25).

In other words, Luther was saying, the gospel is about Jesus Christ and what he does for sinners; it's not about what we as sinners can do for ourselves.

And then he made this point, and it's one that is important for our text today:

“The law says, ‘Do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘Believe in this,’ and everything is already done.” (Thesis 26)

So for sinners like us, our only hope is in experiencing this truth:

- The law is about what we do and what we have done.
- The gospel is about what God has already done for us in Christ.

And God has been using Paul to tell us what has been done for us in Christ. Last week, even, Paul was telling us why we can't continue in sin any longer, but up through verse 10 he was still giving us a lot of objective truths that the Christian life is meant to be built upon.

Paul was showing us: who it is whom we're united to by faith: (Jesus). Here is who we died with: (Jesus). Here is what God did with our sin: (he crucified it).

But now it's as though Paul is saying, “Okay, I've been making the argument for why the gospel doesn't mean we should continue in sin. And it starts with God in Christ and what he has done for sinners. The gospel is built on these things. But we were supposed to be getting to this practical conclusion: we shouldn't continue in sin.”

So this week Paul gets extremely direct and practical, and makes specific application.

Because we have been crucified with Christ... because we've been united to him by faith... what does that mean when it comes to sin in practical daily terms?

Here it is. Paul gives us four consequences of the gospel, related to our daily gospel walk. First is how to think of yourself. Second, how to control yourself. Third, how to present yourself. And fourth and finally, who governs yourself.

Not only is this important for why we should not continue in sin, but it also pushes back on a very modern idea that we make ourselves, define ourselves, give ourselves identity, and choose our own purpose. What Jesus is doing is saying, "Here is what a gospel identity looks like: one that isn't chosen by you, but one that will define and direct just who you really are, now that you are in Christ."

1. How to Think of Yourself (6:11)

First, Paul tells us how the gospel tells us to think of ourselves.

He begins in verse 11 by telling us how we should consider ourselves.

This raises something that I'm eager to talk about. "Who are you?" The question identity (the question of what makes us who we are, and who we're meant to be) is a very pressing one. Carl Trueman does an excellent job of laying out the somewhat unique modern dilemma:

"In times past, a relative static social order and comparatively stable institutions—for example, nation, church, family—meant that personal identity was something we were given, something over which we had little or no choice. But in a world of flux and change, such as that which we now inhabit, such solid external markers of identity no longer provide us with the framework for understanding ourselves. At the same time, and perhaps in part as a response to this, the question of identity has been further complicated by the prioritizing of feelings and psychology as determinative of

who we are. To the question, Who are you?, there now seems for so many people no easy or straightforward answer.”¹

Trueman is saying that apart from God, people face not only the loss of the old anchors of identity, but also the overwhelming pressure to create an identity for themselves. The possibilities seem endless. Who do you want to be? How do you want to define yourself? Your job, your sexuality, your politics, your hobbies, your passions—all are presented as potential building blocks of the self.

The 20th century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once described what he called *nausea*: a kind of dizziness that comes when you realize that you have too much freedom, that there are too many options, and that nothing outside of yourself is going to tell you who you are. That kind of radical freedom, Sartre said, makes a person queasy. And if you’ve ever tried to invent yourself out of nothing, you may have a taste of what he means. Trying to do that is not liberating; it’s crushing.

But here is the good news: God hasn’t abandoned us or left mankind spinning in that nausea. He anchors us. He gives us purpose and meaning and identity by telling us who we are. He made all human beings in His image to glorify Him. And believing this is a remedy to this “nausea” that Sartre talked about.

And when we come to Christ, God speaks another clear word over our identity. How should we think about ourselves, consider ourselves... who are we? In today’s passage, verse 11, Paul says: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

In God’s world, there is no burden of inventing yourself, no pressure to decide who you are from scratch. God has already declared it: you are His, you are dead to sin, and you are alive to Him through His Son.

Let me mention a couple of implications that come from this. First, identity is received, not invented.

We need the one who made us, who gave us life, who put his mark on us to tell us who we are, what we mean, and what our value is. None of us has the ability to give ourselves meaning, purpose, direction, or a reason for

¹ Rosner, Brian S.. *How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward Is Not the Answer* (p. 11). Trueman’s foreword.

existence. Here Paul is telling us that we have an identity from God: In Christ, we are alive to God.

When Calvin talked about this verse he said that Paul was telling us that we have a new status, but also a new direction. We don't live for ourselves any longer. [that's a change of direction] We don't define or worship ourselves, but our life is now built around the Creator who made us... and we share in the resurrection life of Jesus. We now have direction, we have growth, we have progress, and a goal that we live for now. The Christian has no reason to experience the *nausea* that Sartre described.

And that's because of this first point: identity is received, not invented.

A second implication from what Paul says here is this: the ground of our identity is found in our union with Christ.

Our self is now inseparable from Christ and his death and resurrection. To know Jesus is to know yourself. Think of the stability that comes from this: Christ's work is finished, and that means your identity is secure. You don't bear the crushing pressure of self-invention.

The answer to so many of the modern anxieties that people experience is found here.

And this means something important for parents. It is our job to teach children what their identity is in God, and in Christ. Many parents create needless anxiety for their children by asking them questions like, "Who do you think you are? Who do you want to be?" And those might seem like harmless questions, but think about it: *Adults* can barely handle those kind of questions. I'm 43, and I would lose my mind if it was up to me to decide who I am. No adult can handle this pressure of self-creation, and children are even less equipped to understand or figure themselves out, as if meaning could even be found within our own hearts (it can't be).

We had someone close to us once say, "We're Christians, but we're not going to take our kids to church or brainwash them about what they should believe. They are actually very wise and need to decide for themselves what is true."

No, no, no. You might as well send your kids unarmed into the wilderness without a compass or clothes on their back. Because when you parent this way, you are throwing them to the wolves. Someone out there will absolutely take your job, parents, and they will catechize your children if you won't. Children will be taught, and it is an insane proposition for parents to say, "I won't do it. If I do it it's brainwashing. If the world does it, my kids are just maturing."

Parents, love your children enough to teach them the gospel, to bring them to church, to pray for them, to read Scripture with them, to give them direction. Don't throw them to the wolves.

Now, a word to the kids here: parenting is really challenging. And I hope that someday you get to experience that. But if you're a son or daughter, let me ask you to help with something important in your home: help your parents by being excited to learn, by being excited to be equipped to be a part of this world, by being eager and willing each week to come to church with your parents. Because whether you always feel it or not, when you come to church you're not just worshiping, you're not just meeting with God and his people, but you're also being taught by God who you are, and what He created you for.

And listen: lots and lots of parents don't love their children enough to do this for them. And so kids, if you have parents who go to the effort each week of bringing you here, just know that they really really love you.

And so encourage you parents. Don't make it difficult to come to church each week. Help them, even. I might ask you to even thank them for loving you enough to bring you to worship. Lots of children in this world don't have that, and they really are in the wilderness and in need of direction.

The most important and fundamental questions about our children's identities has already been answered by God. Our task is to *teach* them who God says they are. Our task is not to throw them to the wolves to figure things out all on their own or to invite them into the open-ended freedom of Sartre's *Nausea*.

For all of us – adult or child – there is no more important way to understand ourselves than to know God, to immerse ourselves in his word, and to pray, "You tell me who I am."

God has already told us how to think of ourselves. We are his creatures, created for his glory, and in Christ we are those who are called to think of ourselves as dead to sin.

2. How to Control Yourself (6:12)

Second today, Paul tells us how the gospel tells us to control ourselves.

Look at verse 12: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”

Notice the movement of how Paul encourages us here. Previously he said, “consider yourselves dead to sin.” In other words, first, we know who we really are and we meditate on it. Then he says, because of who you really are, don’t let sin reign in your mortal body. Don’t let it boss you around or rule your heart. Just because your sinful self wants something doesn’t mean you’re obligated anymore to do what it says. So because of that, he says, *don’t* let it reign.

He uses this phrase “mortal bodies,” He could have just said “bodies,” but he says “*mortal* bodies.” What’s he doing? He’s reminding us, the only reason our body is mortal is because of sin. That sin is not your friend. That sin is a source of pain and suffering. It’s the reason we die. So no, don’t trust it. Don’t let it reign, and don’t make peace with it.

You wouldn’t let a convicted serial killer watch your kitchen knife even for a minute, and you shouldn’t let sin reign, either. Happiness will not follow.

Think of how he talks here. He’s very active in how he talks about us. In a lot of ways, Paul is really showing us, isn’t he, that the gospel isn’t contrary to efforts and exertion to resist and avoid sin. We have an active role in fighting our own sin.

Augustine says it like this: “We must engage in a constant, daily struggle not to obey those desires which are forbidden or improper.”

Believers really need to be encouraged that a gospel “resting and receiving” of Jesus Christ is compatible with – and in fact calls for – efforts to fight against sin. This fighting against sin is a part of our new nature!

When Peter Martyr talks about this verse he reminds us that People tend to think that God is depriving them of something when he tells us not to sin. It sounds like he wants to deprive us. And that's because we still have this twisted view that says, "only when I can do anything that I want will I really be happy." Which of course leads us back to the nausea that Sartre spoke of. It's life untethered from purpose or meaning, and we can't handle it.

The problem, as we'll see in romans 7, is that sin is still an ongoing issue for us. So what Peter Martyr says is this: when Paul tells us that sin shall not reign in our mortal body, Paul is actually urging us toward "the thing in which our highest happiness lies: that we might be far removed from all evils, and engaged in the most perfect activity." Why is that? "Because, whatever misery and wretchedness is in us, all of it flows from sin."

Holiness is happiness. It is not *deprivation* of happiness. Sin is misery, even if we're foolish enough to want it. So when he tells us not to let sin reign, he is telling us where we'll find happiness. And we will never be happier than when we are holy. And we'll never be unhappier than when we are unholy but kid ourselves that we're free.

You see, the truth is, there is nothing that makes all of us more unhappy than sin. We might want it, but it robs us of true joy, true meaning, true happiness. It destroys the world around us when we let it have its way.

Paul tells us "not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies." This is how we are supposed to control ourselves in Christ.

3. How to Present Yourself (6:13)

Third today, Paul tells us how to present ourselves.

How does he say we should present ourselves? Well he tells us how *not* to present ourselves, and then he tells us *how* to present ourselves. Look at 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."

As those who have been saved in Christ, let me remind you what this looks like to “present your members to God as instruments for righteousness”:

First, be in Christ. Do not put the moralistic cart before the horse, thinking, “If I can only be good, then God will accept me.” No. The first thing you must do is trust in Jesus Christ and not your works or deeds. So this is my way of saying, live for God’s pleasure from gospel motives. Because God has saved you, now live these things out.

Second, in light of the gospel, present yourselves to God by remembering your moral duties. What does that mean? Well it means meditating upon the ten commandments, not merely as a list of things to “not do,” not merely as a means of inducing guilt, but look at the commandments as a picture and embodiment of our new identity in Christ. It means studying and delighting in the life of Jesus, who lived those commandments out and modeled for us what our life should look like. Our hearts and minds are meant to be filled up with the goodness and glory of God’s character, and his calling for us. In Christ, we should love and treasure the Law of God so that we can pray like the Psalmist, “I love your law, oh God.” Remember your moral duties and virtues we are called to cultivate.

Third, see the moral law as a reflection of Christ and his life, and of who we really are now that we are in Christ. In Christ, when you read the ten commandments, you are seeing your real true self. Your true self that should now be shining through is there when we read the law.

This is an imperfect illustration, but when Arryn and I got married, I think I weighed 195 lbs. In my brain, that is my ideal weight. I’d love to be back to that weight again. There is a photo of Arryn and I at Disneyland on our honeymoon, and we’re standing with Winnie the Pooh, and every time my wife sees that photo, I think you can see a little twinkle in her eye when she sees that guy (not Winnie the Pooh – me). When I see that photo, I don’t think of it as some kind of judgmental cruel message that tears me down. Instead, I kind of find myself thinking, “I’m that guy. That guy is me. This really is still who I am.” And I feel empowered to aim for that again. And in practice that means that I watch what I eat and I exercise because however imperfectly, I

want to live up to who I am, and who I can be. So seeing the picture of healthy Adam motivates me.

That's a little bit of an imperfect illustration of what the law is like for the believer. Because we are in Christ, we should read the ten commandments or hear Jesus preach the sermon on the mount and think, "This is who I really am." And just like I respond to seeing that photo by springing into action. Here's what I don't do: just sit there and wait to look like that guy again. In the gospel, we are saved by the work of Christ, in which we do nothing and contribute nothing. We are justified solely by Christ, whom we rest in and receive.

But when it comes to sanctification – being more and more shaped into the image of Christ – we are not passive, we are active. We don't just sit there. How is the diet and exercise of your spiritual life? Are you active? Are you at work? Or to put it another way, has God been at work in you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure? I want you to know that passivity is not the same thing as holiness.

Let this be a challenge to take your own holiness of life more seriously, and to seek to be the man or woman or child of God that you are meant to be. "Present your members to God," Paul says. That's active. That's something you *do* in response to the gospel, and as an outworking of the gospel.

4. Who Governs Yourself (6:14)

Fourth and finally, Paul tells us who governs ourselves.

There is a battle within the heart of the Christian. There is a battle between sin and the spirit. It's the battle between flesh and spirit. The old man versus the new man. In other words, sin is fighting to have dominion in us. And it's a lifelong battle. What does Paul say about it in verse 14?

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Before this, Paul has already invited us to fight, to be proactive in growing in holiness and being more like Jesus. But now he says that the fight has a goal. There is an end-game and objective: that sin wouldn't have dominion over us. Paul says,

the goal is to see the enemy totally immobilized and to see him as ineffective in our lives as possible, totally subdued and unable to rear its ugly head in our lives.

That's what he wants for us: that sin wouldn't rule, wouldn't reign, wouldn't direct how we live. And Paul grounds it in this important idea. Why won't sin have dominion over us? "Since you are not under law but under grace." He doesn't say, "You shouldn't be under law," but he says, "you are *not* under law."

Ambrosiaster was an early Christian writer from the late fourth century. Listen to what he says: "By forgiving our sins, God has released us from the law. Restored and made whole again by the help of God, we can reject sins by which we had previously been held down." (Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans-2 Corinthians*)

I said this earlier, but law is about what we do and what we've done. Grace is about Christ and what he has done.

Follow the logic of Paul here: because our sin has been defeated in Christ, we now have no fear, because sin – our greatest enemy – has been defeated forever. But we also know that there is still remaining sin within us, and that it fights back against God's spirit.

Here is the question: how does God accomplish this in practice? Last week we saw that God has put our old man to death in Christ. That old man was buried with him, and now we are new Creations. But in practice, how do we see what Paul talks about here actually happen? Well it happens at the level of our loves and affections.

Because we have been fundamentally changed, God's Spirit works in our hearts and causes us to love the good, and to hate what is evil. He grants us a change in our affections. Our flesh desires what is contrary to God, but the Spirit produces new fruit in our lives. What does he tell us in Galatians? The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Look at that list. Some of those items he mentions are virtues, but many of them are affections: things in our heart that we love. The reformed theologian Heinrich Bullinger said it this way: "There is no danger that sin will triumph over those who

do not want it to, nor that it will be too strong for us to resist it when it attacks us.” This doesn’t mean there is no battle, but at least we know what the battle is. We know. And to quote my childhood heroes (and great philosophers) G.I. Joe, “knowing is half the battle.” It’s the battle to love Christ and his goodness more than we love sin and the self. We know what the battle is, and what it’s a battle for. The battle is for a superior love to defeat an inferior object.

Conclusion

What Paul tells us here today gives clarity about who we are and how we’re meant to live. In Christ, we know how to think of ourselves: not as inventors of our own identity, but as those who are dead to sin and alive to God. We know how to control ourselves: not letting sin reign, because sin is no longer our master. We know how to present ourselves: actively offering our very bodies and lives as instruments for God’s righteousness. And we know who governs us: not sin, not law, but grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. What a huge difference; what an incredible turnaround.

For those of you who believe, take courage. The battle is real, but victory has already been declared. Sin no longer has dominion. You are not left to figure out your life or forge an identity on your own—God Himself has claimed you, changed you, and called you His own. Let that free you from despair and spur you on to present yourself daily to Him.

But if you are here and you do not belong to Christ, Paul’s warning is just as clear: apart from Him, sin does reign over you. You are under law, not grace, and that law will only condemn you apart from Jesus. That is why God in His mercy offers an escape. The question, “What must I do to be saved?” is answered once for all: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Come to Him. Lay down the impossible burden of defining yourself. Find in Christ not nausea, but peace, not bondage, but freedom, not death, but life.

Let’s pray.