

The Human Body and Sanctification

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, January 8, 2017
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2017 Real Truth Matters

Romans 6:11-19

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

As I near the end of my time with you as your pastor, I've considered over the last couple months what are the essential things I want to leave with you. What are the essential things of God's Word that I feel most important for your advancement in the kingdom which will lead to the advancement of that kingdom?

We have spoken over the last few weeks on the importance of faith and operating by faith, "for the just shall live by faith." We have stated that faith is simply acting like something is real. Faith is not just a mental comprehension or apprehension that you give; it's not only mental assent and agreement that something is true. No, faith includes that but it goes beyond that to living and acting like it is true. Biblical faith is active.

A couple of weeks ago on a Sunday morning, I spoke to you from the first 11 verses of Romans 6 on the importance of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ and how when He was crucified, we too were crucified. When He was buried, we too were buried, and when He rose, we too rose to walk in newness of life. We are not the same because we have been made one with Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the Christian message—you are not just pardoned, forgiven, of your sins but you have been literally reconciled with God. You've been made one with the living God, the Creator of all things, and there is no distinction in your spirit and His because he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

These are important things that I want to reinforce one more time. However, I think one of the weakest elements of modern Christianity is that we don't know how to maintain our fellowship with Jesus. We want to walk with Him, we desire fellowship with the Lord, but how do we maintain it? So, what do most people do, especially Baptists? We learn the art of rededication. We pray re-dedicatory prayers every Sunday or anytime we hear a message that seems to pinch our hearts and makes us uncomfortable.

We pray that we will once again be dedicated to the Lord afresh and anew, that's all we know how to do until we, once again, fall off the wagon and a week or two later and have to rededicate our lives anew. That's not the Christian life that Jesus died to give you. Thankfully, you're a Christian even if that's the way you live, if you truly have faith in the Lord, but it's so far beneath what He intended.

I think one of the reasons this, walking constantly in His presence and receiving His gracious activity, is a difficulty is because we have failed to understand the role of the human body in sanctification. We talk about the Spirit, we talk about the soul, we talk about the heart, we've gone so far as to learn how the mind is involved. We love to quote Romans 12:2 and how we must renew our minds because we understand the mind has to be involved. A couple years ago we even preached three messages on Isaiah 26:3 and how God keeps Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him. We've learned the mind has to be involved, but we talk little about the role of the human body.

The physical body is involved in our sanctification more than most of us realize. What you believe to be true works itself into the body as well as the soul. In other words, your body believes what you really believe. If you really believe something to be real, it seeps into the body. And not only faith works itself in and through the body but so does our sins.

The Western mind, shaped by Greek philosophy, divides and dissects. We divide and dissect and focus on the individual parts until we understand those parts. The Eastern mind sees things mainly as a whole unit. For example, a grape vine—the Western mind looks at the vine and separates the parts and examines them individually. We thoroughly inspect and understand the leaves apart from the vine, and then the branches, then the trunk, and finally the root system. Each are viewed independent of the other. The Eastern mind does not think this way. It sees each part in relationship to the other parts. The Bible is written mostly from an Eastern mindset.

When Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches," He connected the productivity of the branch to the life of the vine. You may say that this is the same as the Greek mind, that Jesus is viewing the branch separate from the vine. But I argue that He is not doing this at all. His point is that the branches that are connected to Him, the Vine, produce fruit because they are one with the Vine. It is the life of the Vine flowing in the branches that produce the fruit so that it can be said that the fruit is not the product of the branch but the Vine. Hence the branches and vine are one.

We tend to think that both our spiritual successes and our sins are a product of our souls or hearts only. But the Bible says man is a whole being, a single person, made up of individual parts, or members as Paul called them; but man works with harmony between his individual parts as acts as one whole person. You cannot say that your hand is guilty of violence as if it is independent of you, as if the hand that struck somebody has a mind of its own. You cannot say that it is your tongue's fault that you said the unkind word to your spouse or child this morning in preparation to come to church. Your tongue worked in conjunction with your mind and heart and so it can be rightly said that *you* spoke harshly.

The Apostle Paul is showing us what our material body's role is in our sin and our sanctification because as a whole person we either act sinfully or righteously. And when you sin your body is involved and when you exercise faith in God your body is involved. Sin and faith are both in the body and not just in the heart or will of a person.

This is what Paul is trying to help the Romans understand. In order to maintain constant fellowship with the Lord, faith cannot just be a matter of the heart, it also has to find lodging in the physical body. Until faith embodies your body, you don't act in faith. If faith is residing only in the mind or even in the heart and never finds its way to action, it means it's not in the body yet, it's only in the mind.

Let's look at Paul's argument.

I. Sin and Righteousness is in the Body

This doesn't mean it's not in the mind or heart or that the will has nothing to do with it. Paul is making the point that it's also in the body.

*“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”
(Romans 6:12-13)*

He is not talking about members of the local church, but individual parts of your body. While you used to, but now no longer, present your body parts—your eyes, your ears, your feet, your sexual organs, your tongue—at the disposal of sin, now you are to offer them to the Lord as instruments of righteousness.

A. The Body is Not Sinful.

Your body is not wicked or sinful in any shape or form. The Bible says the body is sacred to God and that one day He will resurrect our bodies so that they will be preserved for all of eternity with Him.

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19)

The body is a sacred thing to God. Therefore, we are not saying your body is materially evil. That is not biblical. It is, in fact, a false teaching that the apostles in the latter half of the first century had to combat because it had infiltrated the church. The body is often hijacked by evil and evil will lodge itself in the body, manipulating it for its purposes, but the body itself is not sinful.

B. The Body’s Function.

You cannot understand this text until you realize what your body’s purpose is. Why did God give you a body? Why didn’t He make you like Himself, an unembodied spirit, or like the angels who also are spirits without material bodies? Why didn’t He make us that way?

The body is the bridge between our spirits and the material world. Here’s what your body is, your body is a machine that you use to interact with a physical world. It has its own supply of energy and carries out the will of the heart. God has given you a physical body for you to live in a physical realm.

As long as you live in this physical realm, in order to interact with your environment, you need a physical body. You can never act apart from your body. Action does not take place in this world apart from these bodies. You need to see is that your body is a machine granted to you to be able to function in the material world.

It has the ability to act without conscious thought. These bodies are remarkable. What do I mean they can act without conscious thought? The body can be trained to act without deliberation or prior thought. You’ve done it in many different ways at different times. Your body can actually operate without the mind being engaged in concentration on what you’re doing. For example, driving. You ought to be engaged on what you’re doing as you’re driving but the truth is, while you’re driving, you’re thinking about something else and, remarkably, you never have an accident. Or, when you’re taking a shower in the morning, how often do you have to consider washing each part of your body? No, you do it without even thinking about it and your mind is focused on something else, perhaps something you are facing that day.

It’s remarkable that the body is able to be trained this way. The mind is still functioning and working in cooperation with the body but the body has learned through being engrained and trained by the mind to be able to do this. This is a benefit but also a weakness. It’s a weakness because the body was enslaved by sin.

C. The Body Was Enslaved by Sin.

This is past tense, for those who are in Christ.

“knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (Romans 6:6)

What does he mean, that when we accept Christ something physically happens to our bodies and they somehow die? Of course, that's not what he's meaning. What he means is this: we know this old, unregenerate self, this person we were before the Spirit of God gave life and regenerated us, that person died with Jesus Christ on the cross. I am not who I once was. That person died and is buried and what was raised with Christ is a completely new person.

When I was unregenerate and when the supernatural life of God was not within me and in my body, my body was enslaved to the power of sin that ruled over me so that my body became hijacked and was used by sin to wield its pleasure. The machinery of my body was now taken over by the sinful passions and desires that ruled me. When you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, what happened? God broke and cancelled the power of this enslaving master called sin so that the body is not dead, but alive to serve God.

When Paul says “done away with,” he simply means that the power of sin is rendered ineffective so that you, in your body, don't have to obey sin's command as it once did. Sin trained your body to operate according to its desires. You lived that way and that was normal. You no longer have to be the slave of sin because the old man, the person you were before Christ, is no longer dominated by sin.

We can see this in many different ways. For example, any kind of addiction. Whether its narcotics, stimulants, or depressants, eventually the drug or stimulant takes over the body and the body literally becomes addicted. It might sound like a farfetched illustration but the principle is the same, no matter the sin. Sin begins to occupy your physical body in such a way that the body becomes under its control and is manipulated by the power of sin because the body is trained by your old man—who you used to be and how you used to live. All of the habits you used to have before Christ, most of them were not canceled the day you were saved.

There are occasions, mostly rare, when we hear of somebody being delivered instantly from drug abuse, alcoholism, or some other physical addiction the moment they're converted, but that's not normally the case. Most people have to go through a process of deliverance because the body was trained prior to conversion and now has to be untrained.

Here's another example. What about anger? This is something we all wrestle with, do we not? How many have ever caught yourself being angry after the fact and you think, “Why did I do that” and regretted it? You didn't think about it, the person said something and it set you off. There was no prior deliberation, no forethought, no weighing out the consequences, or listing the pros and cons. The moment it happened—you reacted immediately. Why did that happen? Because not only was the will inclined to defend and to selfishness, but the body was trained and conditioned to respond without thinking. This is the same way it operates when driving a car or taking a shower. It simply reacts.

This is what Paul is saying. Sin makes its way into our bodies so we learn how to react to our circumstances and we do. We live out of these bodies. You never act apart from the body and the body reacts.

The appetites and desires of the body and the mind—the flesh—has become so strong because it has been trained by the old man that after the old man is dead and gone, no longer does it have any power or control, but your body is still operating as if it does. Some of us have been saved 30 years, 15 years, and we're still not free from the bodily habits of our pre-conversion days. That's what we're dealing with.

Your body becomes committed to fulfilling the desires that enslaves the will because the desires of the flesh mostly come from the body and the brain. These desires are monstrous and become obsessive, consuming the mind. Here's what happens, it doesn't matter if you're a Christian or not, when you're tempted, a desire or appetite within the body attacks the mind. It goes to the mind and presents its desire. It says, "Please satisfy this. This is really important. This is necessary. This is for our enjoyment. This is the way to happiness." So, the desires begin to argue with the mind. The problem with the human brain is that it's been trained that when certain thoughts come it follows the same thought patterns.

We're dealing with your physical body, not the mind but the brain, which the mind uses as long as you're in this body. You're not a disembodied spirit yet. Let me offer you an illustration. Your car works fine, but something has got into you and you think you need a new car. That desire argues with the mind all of the reasons you *need* that new car. If you don't deal with that thought immediately, what always happens? Every single time that desire will grow stronger and it will overtake the mind and now the mind is obsessed with getting a new car.

Desire becomes obsessive. Obsession is where the desire controls the mind so that the mind can no longer argue that which is good or biblical. The mind is now obsessed with the desire and the mind and the desire are pounding on the door of your will. All the will does is make choices based upon what is the strongest desire. That's the way God made your will. Therefore, the will has no way to exist.

Willpower is misunderstood. Willpower will not work against sin. It never will because it was never designed to do that. The will was made by God to choose based upon what is the strongest motivation at the time. If the mind and body, obsessed with strong desire, bombards the will, the will simply caves. The will easily follows because it's flooded with the desires of the body and swamped by the arguments of the mind. It's like the example of the new car; you're obsessed with it, therefore, every free moment you're thinking about what kind of car you're going to get, what color, how you're going to get it, how you will be able to secure a loan. You're obsessed with the thing.

This is the danger of any sin. This is why pornography is so dangerous. Pornography is all within the realm of a computer or some kind of mobile device. It's all in the mind and thoughts but it's

stimulated by the desires that now obsesses the mind. The mind of a Christian knows it's wrong. A Christian knows he or she shouldn't be doing this but the problem is that the mind is so obsessed with the desire that it can't put forth the right arguments and it's just bulldozed and over-run by the desire. So, the desire and the mind marches straight for the will because the obsessed mind wants action. The flesh wants fulfillment. Therefore, before the person turns the computer on, they have already lost to temptation. It's done before they turn on the switch.

We can sit here and cast stones at the person hooked to pornography but sin works the same way in you, whatever the sin. It's the same mechanism. The choice is made to fulfill the desire of the flesh and this becomes a habit. The body learns the habit and it doesn't take very long. Bad habits are developed easily, sometimes within hours, where good habits take a longer time. Sin then takes the desire-enslaved will and entrenches it, fortifies it, in the body. In this way, the body operates on an auto-pilot. No thought is required. We react to life and situations automatically from this body and we become dominated by a will that is enslaved to desires.

Paul is saying to Christians, that's how you used to live, stop and don't do that anymore. This means two important implications. First, this can still happen to a believer. We can sit here and fool ourselves, saying that doesn't happen, but friends, it does happen and that's why we have difficulty maintaining our fellowship with Jesus because that's what happened and we don't know how to combat it. We don't know how to combat this because we've always talked about sin as an issue in the mind and heart only and have not addressed that it's also an issue for the body.

Sin works through the desires and appetites of the body and brain.

“For when we were in the flesh (prior to Jesus), the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” (Romans 7:5)

That's how sin works.

The second implication is that Paul is saying in verse 13, that righteousness also works the same way. You don't have to follow the sinful habits of the body because righteousness can also work through the body.

D. Righteousness Also Works Through the Body.

“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (Romans 6:13)

How can I hope to just stop and change midstream? We're going to talk about that in a few moments. Paul assumes that's possible in this verse, does he not? Just in the same way that you used to live by presenting your body to that sinful desire, now present yourself to God as being alive

from the dead. You've been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. You have the Spirit of the Living God, the Spirit of Christ is in you, and He quickens these mortal bodies.

Righteousness can now become a godly response of the body. When someone says something harsh or unkind to you, you do not have to retaliate. You do not have to respond out of anger, if you have learned how to present your body and its members as instruments of righteousness.

Let's talk about how we do that.

II. How to Make Righteousness Reign in the Body

Verses 14-15 show you how not to do it.

A. Cheap Grace is not the Answer.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Romans 6:14-15)

Why would anybody even think that way? There is a view of grace, Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *cheap grace*, that simply takes a positional view of the Christian life. In other words, if we've been crucified and raised with Christ, accept that as a fact—it means you're under the dominion of righteousness—and it doesn't matter how you live because grace now covers it, excuses it, and doesn't hold it against you. That's a cheap and unbiblical view of grace. Paul says that is not the answer.

“Yes, I've told you that you've been crucified with Christ, yes, I've told you that you've been buried and raised with Christ and as Jesus died to sin, you did as well.” However, the Apostle Paul does not want you to simply take it as a doctrinal truth that absolves anything you do thereafter. That's not the way grace works, says Paul.

I don't know how many more times you're going to get to hear this from me, so listen one more time. Biblical grace is not opposed to the action of good works; it is opposed to the attitude that good works gains God's favor. Many who hold this view of cheap grace are doing so in order to preserve a Gospel salvation by grace that says it can't have anything to do with works. No, we're not talking about works saving you. Grace is opposed to that idea but it's not opposed to good works because it produces them. In fact, it's the only way to produce them.

Therefore, when Paul says to reckon yourself to be dead to sin but alive unto God, he is not saying that the answer is to just accept the fact that we have been crucified with Christ.

B. The Answer is Breaking the Cycle of the Old Man.

The old man is already dead so we can do this, however the power of God does not manipulate you without your consent. You're free to be able to break the cycle of the old man.

The best illustration of this came from my dear friend Paul Washer years and years ago when he and I were talking about this text. He said he remembered when he was a teen, his father, a farmer in Southern Illinois, near Brookport, would always wake him up during the summer months at five o'clock every morning to go work with him on the farm. Five o'clock, five o'clock, five o'clock, every morning. He said, "Sometimes I would pull the covers over my head and say, 'Dad, please, can I sleep another 30 minutes?' 'Nope, son, get out of bed.' One day I was so angry at my father I wished he would go away and leave me alone."

A few days later while working in the field repairing a fence, his father slumped over, grabbed his chest, and in Paul's arms died of a massive heart attack. The old man was dead. But the next morning, do you know what time Paul got up? Five o'clock. Why? His father had trained him and his body to wake up at five o'clock.

This is what the old man does. It trains us. Now that you're saved that means you have the freedom to not have to follow what the old man taught you. We've must let the new man break the cycle and train godly habits.

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18)

What does he mean? He's showing us how sin and righteousness work through the body.

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." (Romans 6:20)

All that means is that when you were a slave to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. Now that you're a Christian and God doesn't ramrod, manipulate, or dominate any of His children, you must cooperate with God. The Lord says, "Present your members to Me." He's not like sin. He doesn't take you by the scruff of the neck and say, "Boy, you're going to do what I tell you to do. I don't care if you don't like it, you're going to do it. This is what you must do and you will do it." God doesn't work that way. He works as a partner with you. He works as a friend working with a friend. He says, "If you love Me, keep my commandments. I'm not going to force you to do this, but if you love Me—and this is a relationship of love—you'll do it joyfully and willfully."

Before I was a Christian, I could never have done this. I couldn't submit to righteousness. Therefore, what Paul is saying in verses 16 and 17 is this. When you commit a sin, you are presenting not just your heart and giving it over to sin, you are also presenting your body.

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"

You are not just offering your heart; you're offering your body as well. You are developing the habit of sin to become entrenched in the body, bringing the body back under sin's control. This is what an ungodly habit is. It's allowing the body to be trained by and entrenched in sin and that becomes a way of life.

However, the opposite is true.

"I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh."

In other words, he knows this is hard to understand and that we're not grasping this. Remember what Jesus said to Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane? "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Here, *the flesh* doesn't mean the sinful attitudes of the mind but the body itself.

What was the problem with Peter, James, and John that night? They were tired. They had been up for quite a while. They had been up all day and it was late in the night. It was time for anybody with any self-respect should be in bed and Jesus wants to have a prayer meeting! They really tried. The spirit was willing, the heart wanted to do this, they wanted to pray with Jesus. They understood that He was extremely sorrowful, they didn't know why, but they knew something was wrong and they loved Him so they wanted to stay awake and pray, but the body was so weak it could not fulfill the spirit's will.

Thus, Paul is saying, "I know how weak these bodies are and I'm trying to illustrate this in a way you can understand."

"For just as you presented your members (the eyes, the tongue, the sexual organs, the fingers, the feet) as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness." (Romans 6:19)

Paul tells us what happens the moment we give into one sin of uncleanness. It leads to more uncleanness. Why? Because sin is starting to entrench itself in the body fulfilling those desires and appetites, which is so easy. That will lead to more and more uncleanness. That's how ungodly habits form. But Paul turns it around and says, "But godly habits are to be formed in you and your life." How? By presenting your members, your body, your eyes, your sexual organs, your tongue, your hands to God. You now offer your body parts as slaves of righteousness for holiness. The actual Greek here means "leading to" more holiness.

Just like when you offer yourself to a sin, the next time you're presented with that very same sin, it's much easier to yield to it, isn't it? How many times have you confessed the same sin? You came to church and confessed that you sinned really bad this week; you shared it with a pastor and truly you were sorry for what you had done. You believed you were done with the sin, but the following week you were once again tempted and you succumbed again. Have you had this very experience? When you give into sin, something is not only going on in your spirit, something

also is going on in your whole person, including the body. Habits are being developed and sin is becoming more and more entrenched in you, ruling you.

But the opposite is also true. The more you do what God commands, the more that act of righteousness gets infused in the body and it becomes a way of life for you so that when somebody speaks derogatorily toward you, you bless them, you do not curse them. That doesn't happen immediately. It doesn't happen overnight. But the more you present your tongue to Jesus, the easier it become to bless not to curse. What does it mean "to present"? It means to give that body part to the disposal of God.

All of this hinges on one thing. It's not prayer. You can pray until you are exhausted and can no longer stay awake, like Peter, James, and John, and that will not solve the problem. You can read your Bible and you must because it's the sword of the Spirit and the way we offensively fight sin and temptation. You need the Word and you need prayer, but that alone will not do it. You need the body of Christ. You need other brothers and sisters. "I'm being tempted right now and the best thing for me to do is get on my cell phone and I'm going to call Brother Kent Howle and I'm going to say, 'Brother, please pray for me because I'm really struggling today and I really need your prayers.'" That's very helpful and it's biblical, but it won't solve the issue, as much as I know Brother Kent's prayers are effectual.

There's only one thing required here.

C. This Requires the Act of Faith.

Let's look at verse 11 and we'll be done. Paul has made this doctrinal treatise known—we have been crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and raised with Him. He's explained it theologically and now what does he say?

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:11)

When Paul says "Present your members," "present your body," and develop godly habits of righteousness, what he means is this, go to the Lord in faith believing that His grace is sufficient. It may include prayer to do that. I want to walk in relationship with Jesus, which means I'm often saying, "Lord, please help me right now because I'm under bombardment by this temptation but You said with every temptation You would make a way of escape, so I'm looking. I'm expecting. You cannot fail me in this." And I just offer whatever part of my body is being challenged to the Lord and always, always—I lie not, I exaggerate not—the Spirit of God has given me strength to resist.

But when I fail to do that, when I fail to believe Jesus, when I fail to take His word to heart and believe it to be true, but have the seed of unbelief in my heart and body, I fail. If I really think that being crucified with Christ might make a great sermon but it's not real to me, I cannot act in faith. Faith can only act like something is real.

If that's not real to you, then let me plead with you to get on your face today and ask the Lord to give you the spirit of revelation, "Lord, I need You to reveal the truth of this Scripture to this heart, this mind, so it becomes a reality that's not just in my head but in my body, in my core."

I take you back a few weeks ago when I was talking about those core beliefs—that's where faith lodges—what you believe determines how you act. And how you act reveals what you truly have your faith in. By the spirit of illumination, God takes His Word so you can believe and therefore act like His Word is true because it is true because God said it is true, and then it will be true for you. Amen.