

Fight for Your Life: Personal (Part 1)

Romans 6:1-14

We spent the last month or so studying Genesis 3 and the fall of man into sin. At the end of Genesis 3 Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden out into a hostile and hard world. I imagine the experience of leaving the garden and walking out into the broader world to be a little like landing on another planet for the first time.

As they make their way out into this new world they are not alone. The one constant companion they will have with them will be sin. They have carried sin out into this world and it will dominate their lives. But it may surprise you to know that the word “sin” is not used in Genesis 3 at all. Of course sin is there and is what caused their expulsion from the garden, but it doesn’t receive its name until chapter 4 when God speaks to Cain. Look with me at Genesis 4:6-7. Here is the first naming of this enemy that is so familiar to us today. What is sin? The Hebrew word means to miss the mark or to wrong someone.

After God names sin for the first time in verse 7 I think he defines the human relationship to sin. Look at these next words. God tells Cain that sin is like an animal crouching in attack position, ready to spring at you and tear you to pieces. Then God tells Cain that he must be prepared for the attack and he must overpower sin. Sin caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from the garden and sin, like a wild animal, will use every ounce of its strength to ensure that human beings are destroyed. Sin is not a tamable pet. This is a fight for survival.

In February of this year a 31 year old man named Travis Kauffman was out on a trail run in the mountains of Colorado near Fort Collins. He was alone and as he ran along he heard a rustling noise in the pine needles behind him. He turned around to see a young mountain lion about 10 feet away from him that had apparently been stalking him. He put his arms up and began screaming to try and intimidate the lion, but the lion wouldn’t back down. It lunged at his face and as he tried to protect his face it latched onto his left wrist and began clawing at him, scratching his face and arms.

Kauffman weighs about 150 pounds and has a pretty slight build. The mountain lion is about 50 pounds. He says he tried to throw the lion off him but they both

ended up tumbling down the slope of a hill and a wrestling match ensued. He tried grabbing rocks and sticks and hitting the mountain lion on the head, but nothing would cause it to loosen its grip on his arm. At this point he realized that this wrestling match would end in one of two ways. Either he would survive, or the lion would. He managed to get on top of the animal and pin its legs back. He got one of his legs onto the animal's neck and pressed with all his might until the lion suffocated.

I don't know how to say this any clearer, this is exactly how the Bible describes the human relationship to sin. We do not negotiate with sin. We do not pamper it and feed it. We do not coexist with it. Sin is not a fluffy and cute baby bunny. It's a ravenous, psychotic mountain lion that will stop at nothing to gnaw your face off.

This is precisely why the great Puritan writer John Owen spoke at length about the mortification of sin. His question is for every Christian:

“Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.” – John Owen

And so, I want to help all of us know how to engage the fight by the strength that God provides through His Word and Holy Spirit. To take this fight seriously we are going to be working through a series called Fight for Your Life: Battling Sin by God's Grace. This will be over the course of several weeks, but this series will unfold in 3 distinct parts. Think of these three parts as 3 concentric circles. We'll begin with the smallest circle and work our way out to the largest circle. The three circles will be 3 areas in which we need to learn how best to take the fight to sin.

So, the first one of these will be the **personal** fight against sin. What do you and I need to do individually to prepare for and engage in the battle against sin? Second will be the **relational** fight against sin. How can we help one another in this fight? Imagine how much better Travis's fight against that mountain lion would have gone if he would have had a partner in the fight. Finally, the biggest circle will be the **communal** fight against sin. In this circle we are speaking of the church as a whole. God gives specific instructions to His church in how to address sin and what to do with a brother or sister who persistently pursues a life of sin. We ignore these instructions to our great detriment.

We are going to begin with the personal fight against sin. What weapons do we utilize individually to engage this battle? I'm going to offer **4 strategies to fight sin personally**. These will take us a couple of weeks to work through.

1. Be Who You Are

Now, this will take a bit of unpacking, but to summarize, what we are saying is that we are to live suitable to our new life in Christ. We have passed from death to life and that reality is to inform our sense of identity and purpose, our desires and affections, and all that we do and say in life.

But obviously to live appropriate to new life in Christ requires new life in Christ. We have talked a lot over the past month about sin, but let's just be clear how dramatically sin has affected the human condition. It's not just that we occasionally break God's law or make a decision to sin. When Adam and Eve sinned it plunged the whole human race into corruption of heart. Our problem is that we are born with immoral hearts, crooked hearts. Those crooked hearts are like a saw that is bent. No matter what is cut it won't be right and no matter what we try to do we can't quite get it right.

Our evil hearts overflow into sinful thoughts, thought patterns, perceptions, attitudes, desires, longings, and actions that are in rebellion against God. We sin because we are sinners. The spring flows with bitter water. Jeremiah 17:9.

The Bible explains this with a number of images. We are dead in our sin. We are enslaved to our sin. To use our analogy of the fight against sin, we are trying to fight that mountain lion with our arms and legs chained down. We have no ability to fight.

It's because of our enslavement to sin that we need to be set free. If we are dead in our sins, we need to be made alive. This is exactly what happens at the moment of salvation. We are born again. We are washed clean. Our hearts are given life so that we are now aware that a fight is going on. The lights are turned on. Being born again is a change in direction. It only happens by the work of God in bringing us to the knowledge of our corrupt and sinful hearts and the need for the death of Jesus Christ to atone for our sin. When we see our sin and repent, or turn from it, and turn to Christ and cry out to Him in faith, we are made alive.

When new life happens, then the fight begins. Dead men don't fight. Those who are enslaved simply obey. But, this is the point of this first strategy. When we are born again, we must act like it. When sin is dominating us and then the chains on our arms and legs are broken, we use them! We don't continue to act like we are chained down. Of course, when we are set free from our chains and given new life, the old sinful ways and desires don't automatically disappear.

At the moment of salvation we are objectively declared righteous and sin is dethroned but not eliminated. We still have what is called "indwelling sin" or the "old man" at work in us, trying to defeat us. But now, we are able, by the power of the Holy Spirit to engage the battle by Being Who We Are.

I think this strategy, Be Who You Are, is taught so clearly in Romans 6 so I want you to turn there with me. In this chapter Paul is going to teach us how we can battle sin as believers in Christ.

In Romans 5 Paul has taught very clearly about our salvation by grace. We are not saved because of good works that we have done, but only by the grace of Jesus Christ overcoming the sin that we received because of Adam. Listen to 5:15.

Now, it might be possible for some people to hear that we are saved by grace and not works and think, "Sweet! If I'm saved by grace than I will just keep on sinning so grace can keep on covering!" Paul poses this question in 6:1 to address this belief. He answers it rather definitively in 6:2.

Paul uses this strong language here to say that if you really believe you can continue to pursue sin and enjoy sin then you really don't understand the gospel and you really don't understand what happens at the moment of conversion. He begins to explain in 6:2. What Paul means when he says we died to sin is that sin no longer has dominion or ruling power over us. When you die to something it no longer owns you. So, what Paul is saying initially here is that the grace of Christ in salvation brings about a decisive break with sin. It completely transforms our status. We are no longer owned by sin, but now we are united to Christ. Look at 6:3-5.

We are united with Jesus in his death and that death brought freedom from sin and new life in Christ and that new life is by definition not enslaved to sin. He goes on in 6:6-10. Our identity has changed. We now have the resurrection power

of Christ in us. Notice verse 10. Death no longer has dominion over Him. All of this is making the point that believers cannot continue to pursue sin and live under the dominion of sin because it no longer has dominion over us.

Now, some of you might be thinking, that sounds great, but I still seem to sin an awful lot in my life. The question naturally arises, what can I do to live more in line with the resurrection power of Christ in me? How can my life be less and less sinful? How can I fight sin?

This is where verse 11 and following is so practically helpful. Look at verse 11. Paul has basically spent the first 10 verses of chapter 6 convincing us that those who are saved have died to sin and are now alive to God. Now, he tells us that to practically make this change the way we live we must “consider” this to be true.

This word consider means to reckon something to be true because of a careful calculation. This is like looking at your monthly budget and determining that you have an extra \$100 to spend and going to Target with cash in pocket. You and I are to look at the facts, the promises of God, and the Words of Scripture and calculate that we are not under the sway of sin any longer but are instead alive to God.

Here's our problem, we don't know the gospel well enough to know what actually has happened to us at the moment of salvation. We can't explain what the Bible means when it says we are justified, elected, reconciled, born again, united to Christ, and that we have an inheritance. What is the result of this calculation? Look at verse 12. We will fight sin! We will Be Who We Are.

Here's what our fight looks like in verse 13. So, here's very practically what we are to do and how we are to understand ourselves. Look at the middle of verse 13. A key consideration in our grasp of who we are is found here. We are to present ourselves to God in a certain way. What way? It has 3 parts.

First, we are those who have been brought. We did not accomplish this change from death to life on our own. God has done the work in us. It originates with Him and His goal for us is that we would walk in holiness. This is fundamentally a description of grace. You have been brought. Grace does not teach us to sin. Grace fundamentally reorients the heart to God to live in gratitude and

gratefulness for what He has done. Titus 2:11-12 says that the grace of God trains us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Second, we understand ourselves as those who have been brought from death. To be motivated to fight sin we have to understand how bad things were before Christ. We were dead. No hope. Enslaved to sin. We have to understand the dreadful nature of sin and how it wants to dominate and destroy us. I think many of us don't actively fight sin because we don't perceive sin as really that harmful. It's no big deal, God will just forgive it and I can move on. Paul says that mentality doesn't match the gospel and we can't perceive ourselves that way. The guy who has brain surgery to remove a cancerous tumor doesn't look at the surgeon after the surgery and say, "that was no big deal. I could have dealt with that myself." Instead, he couldn't be more appreciative of the one who saved his life and removed a significant threat to his life.

Third, we must understand ourselves as those who have been brought to life. The movement from death to life is profound and we have to explore the depths of the gospel that show us how significant this change is and the benefits we now have. Because of this we will present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Look at the rest of verse 13. Why? Verse 14.

We are no longer under the dominion of sin because of grace. Be Who You Are.

If you had a friend who had been in prison for 5 years and who was released, you would expect him to go home, be with his family and friends, and re-engage in normal life. If after a week of being home he went back to the prison, knocked on the door and wanted his old bunk back and to begin eating prison food again, you would think something was wrong with him. That's exactly the picture Paul is giving here. Be Who You Are. Fight sin by God's grace.