

*Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. 20When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

He wears a smile. Though I do not even know his name it seems like we are almost friends because every time I see him I am greeted with a smile. It lifts my spirit.

I think of another one – he never speaks a kind word always attacking, criticizing, complaining – telling about what is wrong with the doctors and the lawyers and the politicians and the preachers. He drags me down.

I think of a child – I hardly ever see him smile – though he is young it seems he is carrying a burden. Has he been struck by his mother or his father? Or is it just hard from him to keep up in life? Do other kids make fun of him? I wish I could lift his spirit.

What has dominion over each of these? Habit, God, sin, other people?

Paul writes: “Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions.” Do these words have anything at all to do with you? If you are not involved in an affair or having sex when you know God does not approve, nor viewing pornography on the internet, not abusing some other person – physically or emotionally, not embezzling nor letting drugs or alcohol control you, not involved in malicious gossip, nor ruining your families finances through uncontrolled gambling. If you are not disobeying your parents nor taking the name of God in vain, not failing to help someone who is in need, not failing to keep the sabbath holy by not hearing God’s word and the preaching of it, nor failing to explain your neighbor’s actions in the kindest way. If you do not let

anxiety about tomorrow dominate today nor letting fears of the future keep you from being generous, if you pray for your enemies and bless those who persecute you. If you go the second mile and turn the other cheek and give away your shirt to the one who has taken your coat from you, if you are not angry with your brother or sister and call no one a fool and welcome the stranger and love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself, if you turn to God for your every need and trust that you will receive every good thing from God – if all of that is true for you then Paul’s words, “Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions” have nothing to do with you. But if any of these things is a problem for you then it is time to present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

“Present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.” Your members – the parts of your body. Paul is not talking about what happens up here in your head but about your bodily existence. Your words and deeds, your giving and sharing and helping and touching all presented to God so that you might be what God seeks for you to be. Sin says that everything about your body is for you – that you are the center – you are the point of it all - your happiness, your rights, your pleasure, your security, your power, your being loved, you first. Sin says that there is no one outside yourself that you can count on – that you will have to be in charge. But Paul says, “Present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”

Then he continues: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Law – that big list of things I read earlier is law for you if it accused you – made you fearful that you are not keeping up. But you are not under that big list but under grace - God’s love given for free to you.

We baptize babies around here. It makes no sense. As far as we can tell, Kendall will not even know that it happens. Would it not be better to wait until she can answer all the questions for herself – present herself to God and always remember that she did so? As it is now we will have to tell her about this act of God in her life, explain it to her, remind her of it if her baptism is to mean anything to her. So why do we baptize babies around here? I think it is

so that it is clear that God has chosen her and not she God. That is grace. Law is God waiting to see how she will turn out before God decides about her. Grace is God saying you are mine - today, forever.

But you who love her hope with all your being that she will present her members to God as instruments of righteousness. You hope that she will be so in love with God that love and generosity, peace, joy, gentleness, kindness will flow from her. You hope that God's word will lead her to stop to help someone in need without even thinking about it – just naturally. You will hope that she will love not only family but strangers as well – that the stories that Jesus tells will become a guide and a habit for her. You will hope that stuff and things will not own her heart but a desire for justice for the oppressed will. What you hope for her is what Paul hopes for you and for me.

Present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

I hope that is what is behind the smile of that man who greets me. I hope that the one who criticizes and complains is seeking to be an instrument of righteousness to God as well. I trust that whatever burdens that young boy can be overcome by faith in God and that he can be brought from death to life.

You are not under the law but under grace. God has chosen you – God says to you – you are mine.

You are. Amen.

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