

Series: Spiritual formation: Habits of a healthy heart.

Sermon Text: Romans 6:1-14

Key Word: Identity

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) warns us to, “*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.*” It’s talking about [the part of us where our desires dwell](#), and our need to be nurtured by healthy relational habits with God and others. For this reason, we’re kicking off the new year with a series called, “*Spiritual formation: Habits of a healthy heart.*” Plus, each Sunday this year we plan to share a different spiritual practice to help you discover fresh ways to connect with God at any stage of your journey. Above all, we want to emphasize that no spiritual discipline is ever an end or a goal. Spiritual practices are a means of grace--a way God gives Himself to us, so that we can be renovated as we abide in and enjoy Him because of Christ’s finished work. Our first 2 lessons taught us how the gospel matters to our spiritual health and how sin makes it hard to maintain a healthy heart. We’ll add one more layer to our foundation today by exploring this...

BIG IDEA: Spiritual habits help us embody our new identity.

Have you ever had a “*mystery person*” pay your bill? Maybe it was in a drive through, or a friend saw you dining in the same restaurant and paid without you knowing. If you’ve been there, then you know the awkward, helpless feeling that instantly pokes you in the pride. When the server announced the good news, maybe you protested and insisted on paying your own way, but it didn't make sense to pay the bill twice. Perhaps you tried to find out who did it, so you could repay them but realized that only turns a gift into a debt. Now, consider the spiritual parallel. Christians can either waste our lives trying to pay God back, or we can accept what’s been done for us--that grace has paid the bill (a.k.a. our massive sin debt). **Therefore**, our ongoing dilemma is learning to view ourselves differently and correctly in relation to what the gospel makes true about us. I mean, listen to these wild claims from Colossians 1:13-14: “*God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” Wonderful things become true of us the instant we’re born again by grace through faith. God gives us a new identity as members of a new kingdom and His holy family. This is what it means to be a Christian!

As we’re figuring out how to navigate this strange dual citizenship, we must constantly steer clear of 2 extremes: [Legalism \(I must obey/pay my own way to be accepted\)](#) and [License \(I'm forgiven, so anything goes\)](#). Concerning legalism: Of course, God's family has rules, but they’re not intended to

make us miserable. Rather, they reveal things like God's character, ways He designed us to function, and how we can relate with Him and others in healthier ways. **Concerning license:** *Romans 6:1-3* presents 3 rhetorical questions that should slow us down: "***Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means*** (certainly not, God forbid)! ***How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who've been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?***" Notice, it says we were baptized into his death, not that "*we did something like Jesus did.*" So, faith somehow makes His death to sin our death to sin! Salvation doesn't merely change our legal status with God, it confers on us a new identity which transforms our relationship with everything. By faith, we're supposed to see the new reality of who God says we are in Christ: our old selves are dead, we have been supernaturally reborn (cf. John 3), and our new life is enlivened by His Holy Spirit.

Next, we should ask, "*What's the purpose of our new identity?*" *Verse 4* says it's so that "***we too might walk in newness of life.***" *Verse 6* adds so that "***the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.***" Now, don't misunderstand...he wasn't saying, "*God hates your body and is trying to destroy it.*" The opposite is true--He will renew it, so you can keep it forever as Jesus has! While "***body of sin***" is a strange term, it refers to our old identity "*in Adam*", a phrase used back in Romans 5 to describe, not only our sin nature, but the entirety of who we were as the descendants (family) of Adam and Eve. So, *verse 6* is basically saying that sin's power over our whole personhood has been "*rendered powerless*" (that's how the NIV Bible translates, "*brought to nothing*"). When did this happen? The moment we're united with Jesus by grace through faith. Then why does sin still feel so powerful? Why do Christians still struggle with sin and feel like Paul did in Romans 7:24--like our dead, former self is strapped to our backs and slowing our spiritual progress? It's because embodying our new identity isn't supposed to be easy, and Jesus this proved repeatedly, especially during that agonizing prayer when He sweat drops of blood in [the Garden of Gethsemane](#)! He embodied this verse from 1 Timothy 4:10 that we read 2 weeks ago: "*For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God.*" Jesus never sinned, yet He became one of us to subject Himself to sin's power, and to experience what we feel, and to prove the payoff for trusting God and resisting sin is worth the effort! Listen closely to *verses 8-10*: "***If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.***" After Jesus was baptized into death on the cross,

God gloriously resurrected Him to prove that death no longer has dominion (power, rule) over Him. We often think resurrection power can only be experienced after we die, but notice *verse 8* says, “***If we have died with Christ.***” If our union with Jesus by faith credits us with already having died with Him, then that means we too are no longer under sin’s dominion! We often look forward to how this will make our death seem more like a quick nap, but resurrection power also makes a difference now!

We hear this concurrence of “the already and the not yet” in John’s words to the 7 churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 1:4-7: “*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father...Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.*”

Are you wondering how we can access this readily available power? *Verses 11-14* say, “***You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 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. For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace.***” So, where there’s grace, there’s power! Anytime we mess up around here, we like to say, “*There’s grace for that!*” You may think we just mean, “*God forgives you*”, but we’re also saying, “*You now have power to change.*” How? By utilizing **spiritual habits** to help us remember and **embody our new identity**. Of course, our disciplines are indicative of an existing relationship, sort of like why I wear this wedding ring: Looking at it reminds me of to whom I belong, but what good does it do if I don’t love, honor, and cherish my wife throughout our marriage--if I’m not all in with her? What good does it serve for me to merely check in with her once a week to say, “*well, I just felt like I had to*”, or “*I did my duty*”? **So, this week**, I’d like you to ponder a few hard questions in relation to your new identity in Christ: 1) What do I value the most? (How I spend my time shows what I value). 2) Do I favor the values of this world, or do I feel more like an exile most days? 3) Can people see my real values in how I live? 4) Are my values consistent with God’s values? 5) What type of person does God want me to be? 6) Where do I tend to find my sense of identity, purpose, value, etc.? To quote Pastor Paul Tripp, “*As children of God, you and I are no longer defined by our identity as sinners. While sin still remains, we have new potential to respond, desire, love, and serve in supernatural ways.*”

Let's pray: Father, we must count the cost and decide whether to pursue spiritual formation or not as the Apostle Paul did in Philippians 3. He wrote, *"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith--that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."* Will we pursue disciplines because we know who we are or who we can be apart from Jesus? Will we practice these things because we love him, and this is who we want to be? Help us, Holy Spirit, to embody our new identity in Christ. Amen.

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **The origin of the question:** "Paul's insistence that the increase of sin is met by the increase of grace (5:20) leads to the question he now raises and answers. So great was his emphasis on the freeness of God's grace in the face of sin that his preaching had been accused of having antinomian tendencies or ignoring the ethical requirements of the law (3:8). Now Paul makes the point that to continue in sin would involve a contradiction of the Christian's new identity in Christ, an identity defined by our union with Him in His death and resurrection. In view of this new identity (v. 11), Christians are to refuse to allow sin to usurp authority in their lives, and instead are to live all of life to God (vv. 12, 13) in the assurance that sin is no longer their master, for they are not under law but under grace as the means of their salvation." (Sproul, TRSB, 1988)
- **Body of sin is a strange term:** "The purpose of redemption was that the old might be destroyed. Paul uses a phrase here—'that the body of sin might be done away with'—that is very difficult to understand. We are not entirely sure what Paul had in mind when he spoke in this way. One interesting theory that scholars have suggested concerns punishments that were used occasionally in the ancient world for those who were guilty of murder. A somewhat barbaric form of this punishment was for the convicted murderer to be sentenced to have the rotting corpse of his victim tied to his own back, so wherever he went he was reminded of the loathsome act that he had committed. He walked around with a dead human body attached to his own back reminding him of his criminal transgression. Some have said that this is what Paul had in mind by the phrase 'body of sin'. We carry the foul-smelling, corrupt old man that is still clinging to us, but in our sanctification, we are to be set free from the power of that corpse." (Sproul, Gospel of God, 112)
- **Body of sin is more than our old nature:** "Our old self (6) picks up the imagery of corporate identity from ch. 5. It alludes to our identification with 'the old man', Adam, and denotes 'not a part of me called my old nature, but the whole of me as I was before I was converted' (John Stott, Men Made New (IVP, 1966), p. 45). As a result of our crucifixion with Christ, this body of sin, the whole person dominated by sin's power, has been 'rendered powerless' (the NIV

marginal rendering is preferable to the done away with in the text). As a result, we need no longer be slaves to sin. As further support for this conclusion, Paul cites a popular rabbinic maxim to the effect that death severs the hold of sin on a person.” (Moo, 1136)

- **A thought on Romans 6:11:** This is the only place in *chapter 6* where Paul tells us what to do. Everything else tells us how to think about our faith-union with Jesus. So, before we'll have a clue what to do, we must contemplate and comprehend our new identity. This passage also is proof that “*grace*” isn't merely “*undeserved favor*”; it's also “*resurrection power*” given to us when God's Spirit comes to live inside us (cf. Romans 8:1-14). We never want to imply that “*Christians are helpless*” or that “*we can't grow and change.*” While resurrection power will certainly raise us from the dead, it is also available in this life by faith!
- **Remembering our baptism:** The key to successful Christian progress involves remembering the story behind our baptism. Forgetting who we are and to whom we belong tempts us to sell out to whatever combo of people, places, things, and ideas offer the fastest resolution or relief. Like pagan priests, we'll offer our bodies in sacrificial worship and service to created things rather than our Creator (cf. Romans 1:16-32). That's what started this mess in the first place, when Adam and Eve decided to trust Satan's suggestion over God's superior promises and provision. Therefore, whenever a Christian feels as if God is taking too long, or hasn't forgiven us, or doesn't love anymore, or whatever...our spiritual practices can remind us of who we are and what He has guaranteed will happen because of the finished work of His Son.
- **Baptism is more than a symbol:** “It can be said, thus, that we were buried with him through baptism into [his] death. What Paul means by this is not that our baptism simply symbolizes, in submergence under the water, Christ's death and burial, for Paul makes clear that we were buried ‘with’ him, not just ‘like’ him. He is saying, rather, that our faith, symbolized by baptism, puts us into relationship with Christ's own burial.” (Moo, 1136) We are supposed to see new realities in Christian baptism, which is a sign of the New Covenant by which God seals His pledge to include us. We should view sacred signs like baptism and communion, not merely as a thing we do, but primarily as a gift we receive--a means of grace (God giving Himself to us), not just mere rituals or symbols.
- **Baptism is not salvation:** “Paul is not saying that the very act of baptism automatically gives us all the benefits of Christ's atonement. We know that, just as in the Old Testament many people were circumcised and never became believers, there are multitudes of people in this world today who were baptised but who have never been regenerated. Paul is not saying that baptism automatically conveys the benefits of the death of Christ. Paul tells us to go back to the beginning of our Christian lives, to go back to the marks of our baptism, and to remind ourselves what baptism signifies. My baptism signifies my identification with Jesus' death on the cross, and that I am mystically crucified with Christ. I identify with that act; I put my personal trust in the act of Christ on the cross, and as Christ was taken down from the cross and buried in the ground, so I, in terms of my old nature, am put to death and buried.” (Sproul, Gospel of God, 111)
- **Baptism is the sacramental sign of the New Covenant:** “It is a sign by which God seals His pledge to the elect that they are included in the covenant of grace. Baptism signifies several things. In the first instance, it is a sign of cleansing and the remission of our sins. It also signifies being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, being buried and raised together with Christ, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, being adopted into the family of God, and being sanctified by

the Holy Spirit. Baptism was instituted by Christ and is to be administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The outward sign does not automatically or magically convey the realities that are signified. For example, though baptism signifies regeneration, or rebirth, it does not automatically convey rebirth. The power of baptism is not in the water but in the power of God. The reality to which the sacrament points may be present before or after the sign of baptism is given. In the Old Testament the sign of the covenant was circumcision. Circumcision was, among other things, a sign of faith. In the case of adults, such as Abraham, faith came prior to the sign of circumcision. With the children of believers, however, the sign of circumcision was given prior to their possession of faith, as was the case with Isaac. Likewise, in the New Covenant, Reformed theology requires adult converts to be baptized after making a profession of faith, while their children receive baptism before they profess faith. Baptism signifies a washing with water. The command to baptize may be fulfilled by immersion, dipping, or sprinkling. The Greek word to baptize includes all three possibilities. The validity of baptism does not rest upon the character of the minister who performs it or the character of the person who receives it. Baptism is a sign of the promise of God of salvation to all who believe in Christ. Since it is God's promise, the validity of the promise rests on the trustworthiness of the character of God. Because baptism is the sign of God's promise, it is not to be administered to a person more than once. To be baptized more than once is to cast a shadow of doubt on the integrity and sincerity of God's promise. Surely those who have been baptized two or more times do not intend to cast doubt on God's integrity, but the action, if properly understood, would communicate such doubt. It is every Christian's duty, however, to be baptized. It is not an empty ritual, but a sacrament commanded by our Lord." (Sproul, TRSB, 1988)

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Paying attention:** How often do you think about who or what is forming (shaping) you and the kind of person you're becoming? 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "*Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'*" In Ephesians 6:12 it says, "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" We're all disciples (students) of someone or something, and that's easy to take for granted. Here's a [provocative thought I came across](#): "*If you read your Bible 5 minutes a day and listen to one 30 minute sermon a week, but spend 4 hours a day on social media and cable news, who do you think is discipling you...or transforming your mind?*" We rarely notice unhelpful influences or bad habits until something occurs that we never dreamed could happen to us. These moments usually inspire us to re-evaluate who or what has been shaping us along the way.
- **We need God to intercede and participate:** While we may desire to commune with God and others, sin makes that super difficult, doesn't it? The Bible begins and ends with expressions of God's deep desire to have intimacy with us, and everything in between explains how Jesus came to fix the problem and restore us to right relationship with God and everything He made. Scripture is a love story about God using His unlimited resources to passionately pursue us. John 17 reveals how Jesus became our way back and intensely prays for us. Numerous other passages describe the endless intercession always taking place on our behalf by The Father,

The Son, and The Holy Spirit. No one is more committed to us than God, which is why it is essential for us to be in relationship with Him and those who love Him.

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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- Douglas J. Moo, "Romans," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us about many other resources.

Direction for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Let's prepare for our sermon from Romans 6:1-14.

- Read Romans 5-7 and share your impressions of what these chapters are implying.

Let's apply our sermon from Romans 6:1-14.

- See questions at the end of this sermon.

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddestrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://tod dengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>