

Ongoing Execution, Part 3
Romans 8:12-13
#28 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – May 7, 2006

Objective: to clearly explain what it means, and then challenge people to be active in putting sin to death, for the glory of God.

Introduction

This story appeared at one time in Reader's Digest:

When the 1960s ended, San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district reverted to high rent, and many hippies moved down the coast to Santa Cruz. They had children and got married, too, though in no particular sequence. But they didn't name their children Melissa or Brett. People in the mountains around Santa Cruz grew accustomed to their children playing Frisbee with little Time Warp or Spring Fever. And eventually Moonbeam, Earth, Love and Precious Promise all ended up in public school. That's when the kindergarten teachers first met Fruit Stand. Every fall, according to tradition, parents bravely apply name tags to their children, kiss them good-bye and send them off to school on the bus. So it was for Fruit Stand. The teachers thought the boy's name was odd, but they tried to make the best of it.

"Would you like to play with the blocks, Fruit Stand?" they offered. And later, "Fruit Stand, how about a snack?" He accepted hesitantly. By the end of the day, his name didn't seem much odder than Heather's or Sun Ray's. At dismissal time, the teachers led the children out to the buses. "Fruit Stand, do you know which one is your bus?" He didn't answer. That wasn't strange. He hadn't answered them all day. Lots of children are shy on the first day of school. It didn't matter. The teachers had instructed the parents to write the names of their children's bus stops on the reverse side of their name tags. The teacher simply turned over the tag. There, neatly printed, was the word "Anthony."¹

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The moral of this story explains the reason we have spent three weeks on two verses in Romans 8. It's best to be careful and not make assumptions.

What Paul says in Romans 8:12-13 spreads its roots throughout most of the books that he wrote after Romans. So this is a foundational thought – something that we don't want to quickly pass by. I could assume that you understand what is involved in putting the deeds of the body to death, but it is too important for me to not explain it carefully.

¹ <http://www.higherpraise.com/illustrations/assumption.htm>

Catching Up – What Paul Has Said So Far:

Let me try to sum up what we've looked at so far.

1. First, we looked at the fact that while talking about sin is not pleasant, it is necessary.
 - a. Because the Gospel is God's message of salvation from sin's penalty and sin's (present) power, we can't treat sin as past history.
 - b. Need to heed the admonition to Cain in Genesis 4:1-7.
2. Second, we talked about what Paul meant by the phrase "deeds of the body."
 - a. He does not mean that all of our desires and actions are evil.
 - b. He does mean that "sin finds expression through our bodies."² The phrase "deeds of the body" is another way of saying "wrong behavior."

What Putting the Deeds of the Body to Death Involves:

On your notesheet there is a list of five considerations. We looked at the first two last week and I want to quickly review them and then finish up the final three.

1. Recognize the obligation. This is consistent with the rest of the NT, which shows that our obedience to Christ comes out of a sense of obligation. 1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 4:17-24.
2. Be willing to call sin what it is.
 - a. We need to recognize that our culture, which is not rooted in biblical thinking, will shape our understanding of what is and is not sinful. We, however, need to allow God's word to mould our thinking in this area.
 - b. On a related theme, we also need to make sure that our understanding of where sin comes from – what causes it – is rooted in what the Bible teaches.
 - i. Illustration: Timmy Guerra complains that it is hot. When he is told to change his clothes, he replies, "You don't understand! It's not me, it's the weather!" We have the same attitude toward sin - It's not our fault, not our responsibility, it's caused by someone or something else. We see this pattern beginning in Genesis 3:12.
 - ii. There is a tendency in our day to look at sin as a dysfunction, caused by problems in our circumstances, needing to be treated with therapy. In fact, sin is the result of the choices we make in relation to our circumstances, and needs to be repented of, not counseled away.

² ESV Reformation Study Bible note on Romans 8:13, page 1626.

3. Understand your part. You are the active party here, not the passive party. But the pursuit of a godly life is in your job description. This is the crux of the “how to:” stop sinning.
 - a. Some of you have been taught a very passive approach to dealing with sin over the years. It sounds ok because it uses spiritually sounding language like, “turn it over to God,” “You can’t do it in your own strength,” “Get out of the way and let Christ live his life through you.” But be careful here. Those kinds of well-meaning slogans can create the impression that we just pray and wait for God to change us, and nothing can be farther from the pattern of spiritual growth that the New Testament sets before us. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.
 - b. Someone might ask, “How is that different than someone without Christ making an effort at moral reformation?” Simply this: they are spiritually dead and you are not. They don’t have the Spirit and you do. And the Spirit has made you alive to God so that you can change. That is one of the main themes of Romans 6-8.
4. Stop doing what is wrong; do what is right. It is important to see this very clear principle: Ephesians 4:17-24 (mind) followed by 4:25-32; Colossians 3:1-17; Titus 2:11-14.
5. Finally, keep working at it. The word “put to death” is not a one-time thing.

There is an important passage in 2 Peter 1:3-11 that contains all five of these points for us. It is worth our reading.

Conclusion:

Paul is calling for a choice and we need to ask ourselves – I need to ask you – what’s it going to be? The choice is a life pointed toward pleasing God or a life pointed toward pleasing the flesh. According to Paul in verse 13 there is a consequence to your choice because the ultimate direction of your life gives affirmation to the reality of your faith. If you know Christ as your Savior, you have the Holy Spirit of God who calls to reflect the character of God. Work hard at that, for His honor and glory.