

## Dead to Sin: Six Articles by Brian Coatney

1. Dead to Sin 1: [What is Sin?](#)
2. Dead to Sin 2: [We Always Serve a Master](#)
3. Dead to Sin 3: [Appropriation by Faith](#)
4. Dead to Sin 4: [What is Real?](#)
5. Dead to Sin 5: [Resist not: Lessons from Job](#)
6. Dead to Sin 6: [What about Our Bodies?](#)

### **Dead To Sin Part One: What is Sin?**

At the end of Romans Five, Paul makes the shocking announcement that God's purpose in the law is "that the offense might abound." This means that, instead of an aid to doing right, the law instead exposes our inability to keep it. This blow to human ego could occur through law: without commands we could disobey, we wouldn't know failure. God had to devise a scheme that would lead to His point—that He created humans as vessels (2 Cor. 4:7), temples (1 Cor. 6:17-19), and branches (John 15) to express His indwelling life and not as originators of righteousness. Our one obedience is faith in His indwelling life expressed through us as receivers.

This fact got lost at the Fall when sin entered through Adam. What happened? The serpent to tempt Eve into blaming God for withholding divinity from her, saying to her, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). This enticed her into seeing herself as less than complete and God, therefore, as adversarial. Adam looked at her fall and then willfully followed her in the lie, choosing her as his God (really himself), instead of appealing to God for a remedy.

But something far more sinister than individual acts of sin occurred in the garden. That day, for sinful deeds spring as fruits from an indwelling root. Sins occur out of a “sin nature,” and sin nature is not we or our flesh but Satan. Paul knew this but wrote the Romans more subtly in Romans, chapters 5-7, where he speaks of sin as singular, unlike his plural us, sins, in the first four chapters.

So the sin nature is not an evil aspect of the self. Frequently someone will refer sin to “my sin nature” or “my old nature.” Does it sound like God, however, that He would forgive all of our sins, implant Christ in us, but leave a corrupt human self? Now it is one thing to preserve the integrity of choice, whereby a person may still choose to sin, but to make sin a matter of human constitution fails to observe the true nature of sin as a spirit not of ourselves.

One of the clearest expositions of sin occurs in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church where he affirms that we all started out dead in trespasses and sins (2:1) and “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (2:2). This means that Satan not only tempts us to sin, but works in us to do the sinning before we become Christians: Satan is Mr. Sin, and his business is to sin through willing humans, using their bodies as his instruments.

John makes the same point when he says, “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (I John 3:8). Now John does not mean that the devil still owns and lives in the Christian every time he or she commits a sin; he means that sin as a fixed way of life constitutes one a child of the devil. Jesus said the same thing: “You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do” (John 8:44).

How did Satan become the “sin nature”? At the Fall when Adam sinned (and all sinned therefore) the spirit of error entered the human vessel and became the disguised inner operator, suggesting his thoughts as ours so that we thought we were just ourselves wanting our own way. We did want our own way, but it was really Satan wanting his own way in us.

Therefore, to die to sin, God must remove from us the Satanic spirit and replace it with Christ as permanent indweller. If we have never seen ourselves as only vessels, this is unthinkable to us, so God has to convince us by broken law until we do see it.

In fact, being operated by another is what sets up Paul's whole argument in Romans 6 that we are dead to sin, where he explains that Christ died not only for sin, but as sin, so that He could die as the first Adam. Christ's body became the body of the whole human race of every generation, indwelt by sin.

When Christ died, sin (Really Satan as Paul tells us elsewhere) left his body and therefore ours, and the lifeless body went into the grave. But a dead body, though dead to sin, cannot live, so the Spirit raised him up as us. The "new nature," so often referred to Christians is none other than "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Dead to sin, therefore, does not mean that a Christian cannot commit a sin, but rather that he or she does not have to, for the sin spirit has been put out and can only gain admittance into the outer man through the deception once again that we can keep the law. Otherwise, we go on with life as spontaneously as we did when Satan lived in us, except that now it is really He living His life, but appearing as we.

I like to say that the Christian life is easy; yes, it's full of pain and suffering, but nonetheless easy, for Christ lives it, and we just go along for the ride, enjoying the ease of His keeping. When confronted with fierce temptation, I say, "Lord, I will commit any and every sin if you don't keep me; but thank You that you are keeping me." That way I end up on a note of faith instead of just wishing it so. God loves faith, so latch on and live lively.

## **Dead To Sin Part Two: We Always Serve a Master**

Confusion reigns when we think we determine and do good or evil as independent selves. Yet nothing sounds stranger, initially, than to consider sin as the devil's control over one's members. When we first hear this, what fear we first experience: "Oh my, the

devil then is the author and enactor of all addiction.” Further, the root addiction turns out to be self for self.

No wonder this radical truth goes largely undetected, keeping sin so effective in Christians; we have liked the idea that sin is human self! We could keep hating ourselves then with the most delicious of religious pride. And how cunning too that sin does not pop out and say, “I’m the serpent, I’m the spirit of error that first deceived Eve and then Adam.”

When first taught that everyone serves one of two masters, I didn’t know I was dead to sin but only that Christ died for my sins and lived in my heart. His life in me was not central to decisions other than, “What does God want *me* to do?” or “What should *I* do?” Not yet did I see myself as a vessel to contain a spirit (2 Cor. 4:7) or a branch to express a vine (John 15:1-5).

Not only did I not see myself as a vessel, but appalling also was the concept in Romans 6:16 where Paul calls us slaves—a loathsome concept to any good, democratic soul. Nonetheless, slaves to a master we are: “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 to death, or of obedience to righteousness?”

This means nobody does his or her own thing, which is offensive news; we don’t give into that without a fight! Every cry of loneliness, hunger, lack of comfort, and thwarted will still signals that we are little monarchs who should receive own way, and we get angry when we don’t.

We wanted forgiveness sure, but little did we know when we became Christians, Jesus not only forgave our sins but also expelled an old master. Then He took over as our new indwelling master. Paul tells us this happened by the body death of Christ: our death, burial, and resurrection in Christ, whereby we were made new creations. Mr. Addiction, the old sin master, is definitely out!

Why then do Christians experience addictions? Paul says it comes from not *knowing* that we’re dead to sin. Yet addictions of all kinds can actually serve as friends, for they violently tear off the mask of a dignified self, supposedly able to control itself, which is the subtle sin of the Christian. Here’s why it’s both subtle and a sin: Paul lists

“self-control” among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23, meaning that only one person in the universe possesses self-control—God .

Think of that: only God can control Himself; everyone else fakes it unless yielded to the indwelling Spirit of God. Everyone who asserts self-control from self-will lives a lie, for no one can really love his or her enemies and die for them other than the spirit of Christ.

I don't quote this to shame anyone, for God does not shame us for our sins, but requires only that we honestly admit them and seek Him so that He can show us how to walk in the Spirit based on our new birth.

This new birth came about by the body death of Christ, which happened once, never to be repeated. When we become Christians, God sees us *in* the crucified body of Christ that died to sin (even though he never committed a single sin). Romans 6:10 says, “He died to sin once for all,” so therefore, we did too since we were in Him.

This means we *are* dead to sin; we don't have to sin any more! Faith walks in that. Yes, one can choose to obey the old master, but that's a divided life—to have Christ in your heart and Satan in your members. Christ has provided for victory within and without. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). No amount of TNT could measure his emphatic “God forbid!”

I'd say that closes the door to thinking we have to sin every day!

### **Dead to Sin Part Three: Appropriation by Faith**

Clearly, it never occurs to Paul that man functions as an independent, created being or that to be human connotes either evil or good as properties of so called human nature. Often, when sin occurs, someone will say, “I'm only human.” Others, wanting to accentuate the positive, see people as basically good—indwelled by a divine spark—and therefore, just needing education to live from the divinity in man. Both of these views, that man is evil or that man is good, miss the point that man is neither. Rather, man

merely chooses sin (Satan) or righteousness (Christ) as his master, and finally we follow our desire; in the end we get what we want.

What about faith, though, for some will say, “Just have faith”? This exhortation is vague by itself and fails to acknowledge that faith must have an object. As Bill Bright once said, “Putting faith in faith is like casting the anchor inside the ship.” To wit, faith must have a reliable object to attach itself to.

Paul offers such an object in Romans 6 when he sets forth Christ in His body death as the basis for saying that we are dead to sin. Jesus Christ, who never sinned, became Satan-indwelted humanity on the Cross and died as the whole human race controlled by sin. When He died, the sin spirit went out of His body, and His body went into the grave, dead to sin, for sin must have a body to operate through. Since we were crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20), we died to sin too.

Now that the object stands available, the second aspect of faith comes from desire. When sin has destroyed us enough, we hopefully desire to know the truth that all along we have been dead to sin since the moment we became Christians. Now want to see the manifestation of this great truth in our bodily members!

Another way of putting this is to look at addiction; no one ever wants to give up an addiction until the consequences have turned so dire that the wish to survive transcends the lust to continue in the sinful cravings. The appetite to sin gives way to the desire for rescue from the relentless and never-ending control of sin: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Desire then leads us to taking—the third aspect of faith. This involves risk, for at the time we take the object of faith, we do not experience the certainty of being taken by it until we have fully committed. As Norman Grubb says in *Yes I Am*, “It is absurd, because the agony of faith is that *nothing can ever be experienced until after we’ve committed ourselves to it, not before*” (181).

When it comes to experience, we desperately would like to experience being dead to sin, but that seems impossible to us because of the sin consciousness we’ve lived in. Yet that’s exactly the truth God commands us to take—that we are dead to sin because of the body-death and resurrection of Jesus *as us*. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us, and He does not live that sin life in us or as us.

Why, though, do Christians even have to deal with the sin issue on a faith level if we are dead to sin? If Satan has been expelled from our body-temples, why can Christians still sin? First, we still have choice, and the old master still tempts us from without, attempting always to deceive us into thinking that we are not dead to sin. Second, we often judge by experience, meaning that we assume our soul thoughts and feelings are the real human self, or that temptation constitutes sin.

Let's face it; we all live in constant bombardment of thoughts and feelings that we fear would get us locked up in a mental hospital if we told someone of them. I like to call these "possibility waves," meaning that they register what could occur, but what one hasn't chosen to speak or act on. These thoughts and feelings have no objective reality and do not constitute more than possibility. Furthermore, Satan continually puts his spin on thoughts and feelings, attempting to aim them into actuality by making us think they really are us.

How then do we walk dead to sin? We do so by continuing in faith that we died to sin (Rom. 6:2)—not wavering—and therefore, we do not live in it. The Holy Spirit bears witness in His way and time to our faith—that He has taken us. As Norman loved to say, "What you take, takes you." The chair takes me when I sit in it; it does its job. Similarly, taking Christ means that he takes us; that's the law of faith. Therefore, we do not try to feel taken, nor do we try to produce that inner witness of the Holy Spirit; we assume we have been taken and go on in faith. God confirms in His way and time.

In the meantime, take it you *are* dead to sin and enjoy the taking.

### **Dead to Sin Part Four: What is Real?**

A reader responses to the last article brought an interesting question concerning the statement, "Thoughts and feelings have only objective reality and therefore just suggest possibility." Objective reality has often been used to describe the world of the five senses. In contrast, subjective reality refers to the world of imagination, intuition, and spirit.

Let's see where this contrast takes us when Jesus heals on the Sabbath, which provokes the wrath of his opponents. Jesus then says, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). By appearance Jesus broke the Law of Moses, but he didn't. By appearance, His opponents seemed godly, but in truth they were not.

What Jesus did looked like work to them, but was it work? Jesus said, "He who speaks from himself seeks His own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true" (John 7:18). This redefines work. The Pharisees lived by their own perceived ability to keep God's law, which *is* work, so they actually were the ones working on the Sabbath, whereas Jesus appeared to work on the Sabbath but lived from rest all the time.

Another scripture contrasting the seen and the unseen is, "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). This context is our mortal bodies, yet the confidence the Holy Spirit gives us of "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). We believe in a new body, one made of spirit. This always provokes those who verify things only by the five senses. Think, for example, about travelers into outer space who report that they don't see God. How could they? He's spirit.

Outer space holds a fascination, but what grips us most of the time is our own inner space—our confusion and condemnation over our thoughts and feelings. In what sense can we say that thoughts and feelings have only objective reality? They originate from the soul and body's visible connectors to the objective world. What can we do about these troublesome thoughts and feelings?

When we know God, we see that life moves from the invisible to the visible, from spirit to body. Jesus, for example, is the word made flesh. He manifested the objective reality of God by uniting spirit to a body. Another example comes from the trilogy of thought, word, and deed. We can confirm a thought and create intent. But in the human realm, apart from supernatural discernment, no one knows that thought until the thinker expresses it by a word.

We all know the power of words. Once spoken, you can't take them back. For good or evil, thought has objectified itself, taking concrete form. Words, however, do not move the limbs, so the next step is a deed.

Horrors you say. “I don’t want my thoughts turning into words and deeds!” Let’s imagine a new scenario though. Imagine that you have a whole, new mind—the mind of Christ. “No, you say, can’t be!” Look, though at 1 Corinthians 2:16, “But we have the mind of Christ.” What an astonishing verse. So now we have a mind with thoughts we’d gladly see translated into words and deeds, and this is exactly what we do—by faith.

As we rest and avoid panic at all the thoughts we don’t want to speak or do, we equally rest that the mind of Christ has taken over the job in us of our speaking and doing. What a relief!

Think about this example: let’s say you have the thought, “I’d like to kill him for saying that.” Remember that a thought without confirmed intent does not constitute reality, but remains a free-floating possibility. Just because the thought crosses your mind doesn’t mean you have sinned. Who knows where the thought came from? Maybe it was just a thought, or maybe it’s the devil’s very own thought, and he’s trying to make you think it’s your thought.

The point is that unless fixed intent occurs, the thought remains a free-floating possibility, a temptation, and is still not sin. Yet think of all the false guilt Satan has tormented us with because of something not even fruited into intent. No wonder Christians love God but swoon under a crushing false sin-consciousness.

The hardening of a thought into intent does constitute sin: “I would kill that person given the opportunity; I would commit adultery given the opportunity.” But even at that, think of this yellow flag before consigning yourself to having sinned for your thoughts: Grace says, “Yes, Lord, I will commit that sin if you don’t keep me, but thank you that you *are* keeping me!” Here, we confess that we would have the intent if He were not keeping us, but thank God, He is keeping us.

Confirmed thoughts finally work themselves into words and deeds. On the sin side of things, the Pharisees couldn’t hide their choice of hatred; they spilled it out violently. Their thoughts hardened into fixed intent.

Now let’s look at the positive side, where we know that we have the mind of Christ. This takes us into faith, where we judge by the facts of scripture and not by our past experiences or present temptation to doubt.

Why do so many Christians find it difficult to say by faith that they are dead to sin? They look at their “experience, @--their record of words and deeds in daily life, and so who hasn=t heard the well-worn prayer, AFather, forgive us of our many sins.@ Then there is the time honored cliché, AI sin everyday,@ which God would like to see become the time honored cliché, “He kept me from sin today!”

We can look at our previous experience or God=s word. He says we are dead to sin because Satan is out of us and Christ lives in us. Why then keep saying, “I am not really dead to sin”? I remember how many times my old Bible teacher, Norman Grubb, used to say, “What you take, takes you.” The way to see experience change is to take something new, namely this liberating word from Romans 6 that we are dead to sin.

Be assured: the One you take, does indeed take you! The mind of Christ becomes the mind that authors your words and deeds. And God said, “It is good.”

### **Dead To Sin Part Five: Resist Not Lessons from Job**

Everyone feels tortured by thoughts and feelings at times. Sometimes the torment goes on endlessly, and we think, “Will relief ever come?” No formula exists to predict these times, and no sin necessarily accounts for them. It’s normal, though, to fear” Uh oh, I’m in trouble.” Even Job, despite his protests against relentless advisors, secretly feared that God was remembering sin against him, though he knew of nothing flagrant like his friends accused him of. Nonetheless, he feared that God had either dredged up the sins of his youth, or now chose to hold him accountable for a hair-line crack of sin in his otherwise righteous life.

We have the advantage of knowing God’s pronouncement to the devil about Job: “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?” (1:8). But Job did not know God’s pronouncement about him, and Job didn’t have a Romans Chapter 8 or

Psalm 44, in which to find comfort. So, although Job knew his so-called comforters falsely condemned him, he began to doggedly argue his own righteousness and even accuse God of injustice.

God doesn't respond too favorably when someone accuses him of injustice. Job needed the revelation that he foreshadowed the person of Christ in his sufferings, not only in the physical sense, but also in bearing up under the scorn of the devil's accusing tongue through religious people. The hatred of the world crushes us enough, but the scorn of our friends—those we trust to understand us or at least intercede for us—hurts the most.

Yet God meant for Job to experience everything that came to him, without self-pity, and without pity from others: compassion yes, but self-pity, no. As Joseph said to his brothers, we can say to false comforters: “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20).

This means that we don't need to jump up and start looking for self-accusation every time we suffer. God still goads the devil by pointing out our righteousness in Christ, just like we see in the book of Zechariah. The priest Joshua had been clothed in filthy garments, but the Lord—right in front of an angry Satan—had the angels take off his filthy garments and dress him with rich, clean raiment (Zech. 3:1-5).

Satan doesn't take this without a fight, and God loves to goad Satan about our righteousness so that Satan will attack us. Satan's worst attack comes in the form of his own evil mind posing as our mind, which is a lie since “We have the mind of Christ,” (1 Cor. 2:16). It sure doesn't seem like it though when those evil thoughts come pouring in, and we feel like, “Woe, I must still have the mind of Satan.”

God means this for our good. When I complained about this to my old Bible teacher Norman years ago, he lit up and said, “Very healthy! Good practice!” not a response I was expecting. I had already tried my friend, Sylvia Pearce, who had said, “Brian, this is so good for you.” I wanted to reach through the phone and strangle her with the cord. So I wasn't getting very far with my advisors!

Let's face it, though, temptation is excruciating enough, but to believe that such an assault should never come upon us, leaves us open to false accusation from the enemy.

Paul details the whole armor of God in Ephesians Chapter 6 precisely because such attacks do occur according to God's determined plan.

But we possess tremendous faith weapons: first, we don't panic, but relax. The inexperienced fighter sees the enemy and begins to look at self. When Satan succeeds there, the inexperienced fighter begins self-loathing and obsessing, saying, "I am so bad." The worst maneuver, however, comes from fight or flight: The inexperienced fighter, overcome by fear, wants to tense up and fight, or else, failing to win in an initial blast of self-effort defense, wants to run.

Faith's strategy, which looks insane to others, consists of relaxing and doing nothing. We say something like, "This whirlwind of inner evil thoughts is going nowhere. It is the mind of Satan but has nothing in me to grasp on to; it cannot force one word or action out of me." God has swallowed up the trespassing mind of Satan, and uses Satan's negative energy as a new thrust for good.

After enough resistance wears us down, we more easily quit fighting and accept God's keeping in the midst of suffering or temptation, instead of demanding that God get us out of them. I like to say now that the Christian life is easy, and it is easy, just excruciating at times! It's easy because Christ lives it; we do nothing but believe. It's excruciating because God means suffering. If we don't confuse suffering with the ease of His keeping, we find our comfort every time.

The same holds true for handling addictions. We think our cravings are irresistible, that we can't hold out against them. But as much as we think we will die if we don't get that certain something, we will not die. When we let go of addiction, God fills us with His Holy Spirit. Not only that, in the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22, the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. Those leaves contain everything in God's pharmacy: "at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa. 16:11).

God satisfies me in every way. You can know that too.

## Dead to Sin Part Six: What about Our Bodies?

Christians often refer to the “old man” or “old nature” as if referring to themselves. This can present quite a messy and complicated view of the Christian as a combination of both old and new—even like an unreliable car with some great new parts but still an unreliable car! Much of this confusion comes from viewing the body as evil, or even worse, from viewing it as in control of us instead of the Holy Spirit.

What scriptures can help us sort this out? While it is true that sin must have a body to operate through, it does not follow that the body is sinful. Paul tells us that the body is dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10), but he there refers to sin as the agent of mortality, not the body as sin. Our mortality, as the one remnant of the Fall that remains with us, means that we walk by faith and not by sight. But God leaving us in perishable containers does not imply His displeasure with the body or he wouldn't command us in Romans 6 to present our bodies as instruments of righteousness. Also, without the body that perishes, we could not connect with unbelievers in empathy, as Jesus, in his incarnation, connected with us.

The scriptures celebrate many things about the body: joyful feast times before the Lord, the beauty of the earth, conjugal bliss, fruitful labor, and even wine that makes glad the heart of man for those the Lord permits to drink it. Ours is not a life of, “Touch not; taste not; handle not” and to forsake “doctrines of men” (Col. 2:21, 22).

The problem with the body came when Satan got hold of it in the Garden and infused his self-for-self nature into it to work his will. Properly speaking, then, the old nature is Satan, and the old man is the Satan-I union we lived from before becoming Christians. The new nature, then, is Jesus Christ, and the new man is the Christ-I union we live from after the new birth. We're about to find out that the old man is dead.

Paul tells us “the old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (Rom. 6:6). That's a powerful statement, implying that Jesus became the old man, indwelt by the old nature, when he died on the Cross. Jesus not only died for our sins; God “made him to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). What a shock. Jesus never sinned,

and yet God made him to be sin, meaning that God made him the old man in order to destroy the body of sin.

But wait a minute, I still have the same body I've always had, and I've committed plenty of sins by that body, so how could the body of sin have been destroyed? Yet Paul says in Rom. 6:3, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Having spent so much time looking at the 2000 years that separate us from Christ's death, that can sound strange to our time oriented ears. Plus, we're used to thinking of Christ's death as *for* us, but not *as* us. However, when He died, we died in him and are therefore, free from sin. Let's follow that Romans 6 trail further.

Paul calls on us to reckon this true, which means agreeing with it as fact. In an earlier lesson we talked about how faith means that something is available, desirable, and there for the taking. Reckoning means we take; we take what we reckon on. This can sound like laborious choice, something calculating and tedious at times, but when we're desperate, we love our reckoning as much as any miser ever loved counting his money.

Paul then says that sin has no more dominion over us. That means freedom from sin and Satan, as well as freedom from bondage to others from whom we've craved approval. As I write this, I'm also thinking of my fellows out there who still see themselves as addicts—Christians who love God but do not know how to be free from the domination of the body and its appetites. God-given pleasures have turned into nightmares of craving and capitulating, only to bring Satan's accusing finger and shame. Satan does the luring, and then, having enticed us into partaking, Satan does the accusing: "Look at you; you're not dead to sin."

Christians still experiencing addiction are living a lie. Yes, be honest and acknowledge your experience, but then obey God by faith and reckon yourself dead to that addiction or codependency. You can reckon it now, not by feelings of course, for we may never feel like it! The word "reckon" is a Spirit word, not a feeling word. If we didn't feel addicted, we wouldn't need to reckon ourselves dead to anything. The fun of living by faith takes place when we feel like we're in hell, yet we know we're in heaven.

As an example, think about mountain climbers. They don't go to the Himalayas because they like feeling outwardly secure and in control all the time. God created us to

enjoy letting ourselves go to His keeping just as surely as mountain climbers lean into their supporting ropes.

Back to the body, Paul calls us “instruments” either of righteousness or unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13). Instruments can mean arms, weapons, or tools. A helpful picture came to mind once: a hammer can be an instrument of destruction or an instrument of construction. That sounds simple; the hammer is not good or evil but expresses the will of the wielder. Remember that old American ballad, “If I had a hammer”? Jesus sings the same song, thinking of us.

Granted, we’re people, not hammers; but Paul doesn’t mind reaching into his bag of illustrations. God did the same thing through the pen of Isaiah: “Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth” (Isa. 41:15).

Faith turns us into expressers of His mighty power. Even through our weak bodies and torn up souls, His energy pours forth. Further, God does not ask us to be powerful, merely available. For the mountains He means to level, any shovel will do. “Too big a job,” you wonder? Zechariah tells us that big things start small: “For who hath despised the day of small things?” (4:10). All available instruments are welcome!