

“BY THE SPIRIT, KILLING SIN.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 8:12-15

We are in this greatest chapter of the greatest book talking about our being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit, between being a slave and a son.

Sometimes Paul refers to the flesh to mean our human bodies. And sometimes Paul refers to the flesh to mean that seat of remaining sin. Having a fleshly, material, physical body is fine, that's what God has given us. But we have fallen physical bodies in which sin continues to dwell and will continue to dwell until we are fully redeemed and glorified in heaven.

Think of a huge weed patch, untouched, uncultivated. That is our old man. Then God comes and plows the weed patch under and makes it into a garden. Now it is new, now it is a garden and no longer a weed patch. That is one kind of death, the death of our old man.

Romans 6:6, 14 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you.

When we become Christians, a death takes place, the death of the old man, the old way of living, and we are no longer slaves to the flesh, sin has no dominion.

But then what happens? Weeds start to grow again which calls for a second kind of death. The good gardener goes out every morning and pulls out the small weeds that keep coming back.

This kind of killing of weeds is continuous, ongoing, and it is done by the Spirit. The Spirit goes out in the garden with us and says, “See that one, pull it out. And there that one too. And there's another one over there, don't overlook it, don't leave it there.” There will always be weeds and if we are Christians with the Holy Spirit we will always be pulling them.

Notice how Paul words it, he is being very careful with his words here. “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but *if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body*, you will live.”

The means for doing it is not your own strength, not your own will power, but by the Holy Spirit. God works in us enabling us to do the work He calls us to do.

II Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.

A great old Puritan pastor meditated long and hard on how to do this and he wrote:

“A man may easier see without eyes, and speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Holy Spirit.”

But don’t take this the way some people do and think there is nothing for us to do. We just sit idly by and wait for the Spirit to do the work. You know, like those who just say let go and let God.

The sanctifying work of the Spirit is never designed to be a substitute for our work. The life of a Christian means taking up our cross and actively putting to death all the deeds of our sinful flesh.

In the Spirit, enabled by the Spirit, depending on the Spirit, make every effort to subdue our sins, those sins we do with our eyes, our ears, our hands, our tongues, our minds, and our hearts, especially our hearts.

Only those who have the Spirit will be able to see their sin as God sees their sin, and be able to acknowledge that it is a great offense to our Holy God, it is cosmic treason against our Creator. Only by the Holy Spirit will we be able to stop making excuses for our sin or try to justify it, or wink at it, or sweep it under the carpet, or ignore it, or worse tolerate, or even worse yet accept it, saying “Oh well, that’s just the way I am.”

Too often we do everything but kill our sin. We agree it is sin, we feel bad about it, we do a few things to try to make it less, but then we sneak back for a few more bites of it, just a little, but nevertheless keeping it alive. Satan will whisper, it’s just a little sin, it’s just a secret sin, no one will ever know, you have pulled out a lot of weeds, these few won’t matter.

No, by the Spirit cultivate enmity with sin. You don't kill friends. You kill enemies. This is a call for spiritual Round-Up to be liberally applied. We must starve it to death, deprive it of all means of living.

Take on God's attitude about sin and hate it. Don't make friends with sin and temptation, don't invite it over to your house or into your heart or mind. Don't make treaties with it or enter into alliances with it. Tolerate no compromises, take no prisoners, kill sin before it kills you.

Hate what it does to our souls, hate the spiritual danger it places us in, hate the source which is Satan, hate what it does to our relationship with our Father. Hate it.

Do you want to live? Then stop making peace with whatever in your life is dragging you to the side of the enemy. Get a wartime attitude. Get violent.

You want a good model or example for killing sin. Do to sin what the Pharisees and Romans did to Jesus.

“Just as the guards were ruthless with Christ, so much more ought we to be with our sin which sent Christ to the cross! The Pharisee's hated Jesus. Do you hate your sin more than they hated our Savior? Or do you coddle your sin and secretly love it? It takes a deep hatred to kill a man, and that is the hatred we must have for our sin. “Put to death the deeds of the body and you will live” (Stephen Unthank).

We are being called to commit pre-meditated murder against our personal sins. Pre-meditated, that means you have thought about it before hand, you have come up with a plan, you have the means for doing it, and you carry out the execution.

Let's talk about some steps for a practical plan to be putting to death our sin.

First, you have to be able to identify the enemy. This can't be done against some vague, general ideas about sin. Name the sin, get honest, get specific.

Romans 1:29-31 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Galatians 5:16, 19-21 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ... 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries,

dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So you have the Spirit, you have the names and addresses of your sins. Now you must by and with the Spirit start the nasty business of knocking them off. You cannot “mortify” sin without the pain of the kill. There is no other way.

Our objective must not be to wound sin, nor to weaken sin, nor to hamper nor cripple sin — but to kill it, to put it to death, to starve it to death. This is mortal combat: Sin dies or we die.

Don't be naïve, this is nasty business, it is dirty work, it is hard. And the sins you kill never stay dead, they keep coming back to life, sometimes the same day, sometimes the same hour. Sort of like whack a mole, they keep popping up again and again.

Put to death sounds too much like it is one time, final and complete. It is not, it should read are putting to death the deeds of the body. Present tense, ongoing, Christian lifestyle, way of living.

The work is never done, but progress and victory are possible in and by the Spirit. Avail yourself of the tools the Spirit has given you for the fight.

The Word of God. Daily.

The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit, it is a weapon for killing sin. Wield the promises of God against sin and Satan.

Psalm 119:11 I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, ... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

So judge for yourself, by what standard are you living? To live by the flesh means to live by no faith, to not desire to be holy, to not live by the Word of God, to not want to follow and depend on God.

Prayer. Daily.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Ask for the Spirit's help and power in all these things. "By the Spirit . . . putting to death the deeds of the body." Don't do this alone or in your own power.

Confession. Daily.

Admit your failure and confess all known sin every day (1 John 1:9). Jesus taught us to ask God daily for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12).

Whenever you sin, confess. Right there in the moment, offer up a quick prayer. "Holy Father, I have sinned again, have mercy on me a sinner, cleanse me with the blood of Jesus and enable me by the power of the Spirit to flee temptation, to resist evil and the evil one."

If we are confessing our sin and fighting our sin, that means we are alive, we have the Spirit who is leading us to do that. It is when we are not confessing and not fighting that sin holds sway and in that case we are dead.

If you are struggling, if you are battling, if you are weary in the constant warfare, if you are frustrated, disappointed, hating that you do what you don't want to do and not doing what you want to do, take heart, that is the sign of life, that is the sign of killing sin.

Keep short accounts. Daily.

Unconfessed sin is a sink full of dirty dishes. Snippy remarks, snide comments, sarcasm, put downs, "you never, you always" comments, bitterness, then silent treatments, and before long you have a mountain of dirty dishes left for someone else to do. What do you do? Start washing the dishes, scrape off the snippy remarks, scrub off the silent treatments, clean up the mess you made. The greatest marriage counseling hack is keeping short accounts, confessing quickly, specifically and continually.

Practice yourself and teach your kids not to just say "I'm sorry," but instead say, "Please forgive me for doing x, y or z."

Husbands, ask your wives to forgive your sinful anger, lack of gentleness, lack of understanding, pride, laziness, indifference, etc. Wives, ask your husband to forgive the ways you failed to obey the Lord in your relationship to him.

Paul warned believers not to “let the sun go down” on sinful anger, because Satan will get a foothold in our relationships when we do so. We must learn to confess our sins quickly.

Finally, when you stumble and fall, and you will, don’t stay down there, but repent and repent quickly.

Proverbs 24:16 The righteous falls seven times and rises again.

Tears of repentance drown sin and quench the just wrath of God. As a gentle answer can turn away wrath, so tears of repentance gain mercy from God. Ask God to quicken your conscience to hate sin quickly and never become hardened to it or give up. Ask for Him to give you a stronger desire for a pure heart.

Implications and application.

Do you ever wonder if I take pleasure in preaching passages of Scripture like this that deal with sin? The fact of the matter is, I do. I know personally how strong and real and frequent sin is in my own life and how defeating and discouraging it is. Passages like this give me hope and help and I delight to show other sinners where their hope and help is. Like one beggar telling other beggars where the bread is.

This will come as a shock to Joel Osteen, but do you want to know what is your best life now? Seeing your sin and humbly confessing your sin and repenting of your sin and asking forgiveness for your sin.

If doesn’t get any better than that. There is nothing more beautiful, nothing more liberating, nothing more joy producing and worship enabling than confession and repentance and forgiveness. Living according to the flesh is a death sentence. Living according to the Holy Spirit is live giving, that is the Holy Spirit removing death from us. That is the Holy Spirit making us holy.

If you are experiencing the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in your life that is evidence of the hand of the living God in your life, that is evidence of divine love and faithfulness to you, that is evidence of God’s commitment to bring you into His holy presence, that is evidence that He is your Father and He is treating you as His own son or daughter.

Don’t despise the Spirit’s correction and conviction and discipline and admonishment, and don’t despise the instrument of that work, whether it is from a spouse or parent or friend or pastor or elder or stranger.

By the Spirit daily be putting to death the deeds of the body, and spend a lifetime glorifying the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in your life, in victory after victory.

Prayer: Holy Father, have mercy on us and forgive us for our failures in the continual fight against sin. Forgive us for weak and half-hearted efforts and prayers. By the power of your Holy Spirit in us, grant us new resolve and new power and a greater love and knowledge of you. Grant us the will to say no to every temptation and to resist Satan at every turn. Sever the root of sin in our hearts and replace it with a far greater and purer passion to be like Christ. May your name and the name of Christ which we bear as Christians be so precious to us that we might never defile it. In the pure and holy and mighty name of Jesus we pray, Amen.