

# MORTIFYING THE FLESH

## WEEK 2: WHAT ABOUT OUR NEW IDENTITY?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss *how to put to death the flesh*.
- Colossians 3:5 “Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead** to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”
- Romans 8:13 “...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are **putting to death the deeds of the body**, you will live.”
- **Killing our sin or flesh is not a once off action nor is it done with your own strength alone.**
- To live the Christian life as God intended, the believer must be actively killing sin in their life.
- **“Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” John Owen**
- As Owen further states, to clear the woods of sin in our heart is a critical part of the whole process of sanctification. The process of killing sin in our hearts not only allows us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel but also brings more assurance that we are children of God.
- When our hearts are set on pleasing the father, we are going to want to walk in a way that pleases him, not the world, not ourselves but Christ alone. To do this, we must be able to identify and put to death sin.
- **This is the heartbeat of progressive sanctification, a life lived for God by mortifying our flesh.**
- Week 1: What is the “flesh?”
- **Week 2: How important is my new identity? (Col. 3:1-4)**
- Week 3: How does sin work in every aspect of my new life? (Col. 3:5-11)
- Week 4: Practical steps for mortifying sin. Part I
  - Learn to admit sin for what it really is.
  - See sin for what your sin really is in God’s presence.
- Week 5: Practical steps for mortifying sin. Part II
  - Recognize the inconsistency of your sin.
  - Put sin to death.
- Week 6: What is personal watchfulness? (1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 6:1; Col. 4:2; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Jhn 8)
  - The necessity and cultivation of watchfulness.

## OUR NEW BIRTH

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- When we are born again, there is a miraculous intervention which takes place. We were dead in our sin and only living for the flesh or what our sinful nature desires.
- We were not looking to God or for God, but seeking what pleased us the most.
  - Ephesians 2:3 “Among them we too all formerly **lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.**”
- **How did our new birth take place?**
- **We are given faith to be able to repent.**
  - Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and **that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.**”
- **We are also told that repentance too is a gift from God.**
  - Acts 11:18 “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, **God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.**’”
  - 2 Timothy 2:24-25 “The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, **if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...**”
- **It is a total work of the Spirit.**
  - John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; **so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**”
- **Regeneration**
  - Titus 3:5 “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...**”
- **The Holy Spirit is given to those who are born again so that they know they are God's.**
  - Ephesians 1:13-14 “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, **you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**”
- **The entire work of salvation is done by God through His Spirit for us.** This is important to remember so that we know we are new creations. We did not have the Spirit before but now do. There is not a “made-better” spirit or remade spirit in you, but as a Christian, you now have the Spirit of God living in you.
- If we have been born again by the Spirit of God, then in order to grow in godliness, we must utilize the resources which God has given us to do so.

- Galatians 3:3 “Are you so foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**”
- Beginning in the Spirit is the work of the Spirit upon your life to cause you to be born again.
- We must not think that God has brought us from death to life, from darkness to light just to allow us to try by our own strength to grow into the image of Christ.
- Galatians 2:21 “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”
- If we could obtain a right standing before God on our own, then Christ died for nothing. If there was some way to make ourselves born again or to kill our flesh in our own strength, then Christ’s death was pointless.

### Reminders of who we now are.

- Since we have been born again by the Spirit of God, our new identity is a spiritual one which is going to have physical manifestations.
- We are so quick to either think of ourselves in the “old” way or to just forget who we now are, the Bible is replete with reminders and statements of our new life in Christ.
- The old man is dead, who you were is not who you are in Christ.
- Ephesians 2:5 “even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ...**”
  - This phrase “making alive together with Christ” has reference to spiritual life and not the physical resurrection of the believer. Christ died physically; we were dead spiritually. Christ was raised physically (1:20), we were raised together with Christ spiritually. **We were dead spiritually and now he made us alive spiritually.**<sup>1</sup>
  - Christians are truly alive! We have the power to say no to sin and truly live for Christ.
  - To be truly alive in Christ means that you now know the will of God, you now can please God, you now are friends with God.
- Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**”
  - Our spiritual birth was done “in Christ.” **You are the physical handiwork of God;** He created you in Christ Jesus.
  - Notice the effort that you put in... **NONE!** The believer is the passive recipient of God’s action upon them. He is the cause of someone’s salvation.
  - This is contrasted with man’s word which only leads to death and sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 330.  
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- 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if anyone is **in Christ, he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”
  - Being in Christ means that new things have come, and old things are gone. This means that there should be radical changes which take place in a Christian’s life.
  - A new creation in Christ means that a person’s whole being...their value system and behavior is now changed to be like Christ.
  - One is no longer known by who they once were but by who they now are in Christ.

### **What does it mean to be *in Christ*?**

- Being “in Christ Jesus” is a stupendous reality. It is breathtaking to be united to Christ. Bound to Christ.<sup>2</sup>
- To be in Christ, first of all, means that we have a saving relationship with Christ and are brought into union and communion with Him in such a way that, as we are in Christ, **what is true of Christ becomes true of us**. His grace and His resources become our experience and possession.
- **Being in Christ means that there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God.**
  - Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Being in Christ means that we have been redeemed, forgiven of our sins and lavished with His grace.**
  - Ephesians 1:7 “In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”
- **Being in Christ means that we have been made righteous before God.**
  - 2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
- **Being in Christ means that you are a son of God and clothed with Christ.**
  - Galatians 3:26-27 “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”
- **Being in Christ means that you are complete and lacking nothing you need for a righteous life.**
  - Colossians 2:9-10 “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.”
- The list of your new creation benefits can go on and on. The point that Scripture continually makes is that you are now, a born-again believer, not who you were when you were spiritually dead.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-things-it-means-to-be-in-christ-jesus>

- Since we are now new, there are new standards and commands that we are held accountable to.

## OUR NEW PRIORITY (MORE ON THIS IN THE UPCOMING WEEKS)

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- This is important, if we have been born again by something outside of ourselves, then we have an obligation to obey the one who saved us.
- **1 Cor 6:20** “For you have been bought with a price: **therefore glorify God in your body.**”
  - You were bought from the enslavement of sin by the death of Christ. Since God did that for you, you are now a slave of His. (**Matt. 6:24; 1 Cor. 7:23; Eph. 6:5-6**)
  - We are now to glorify God in our body, meaning that our whole life is now to bring God glory. Instead of using our body for sin or sinful acts, we are commanded to righteous living.
- **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**”
  - Since God has created us, His new purpose for us is to do good works. He has prepared them for us and created us for them and empowered us to do them (**1 Cor 15:5**).
- **1 Thessalonians 4:7** “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”
  - **God did not elect you before the foundation of the world, send Christ to die and give you a new heart so that you can live an impure life.**
  - God did not set all of this up for you to live according to your flesh and hope that in the end it is all going to work out.

### Sanctification is commanded by the Scriptures and should be our priority.

- **Colossians 3:1-4** “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth. **For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**”
- Our conversion from death to life, from darkness to light includes a radical change of mind. This change in the believer’s mind produces the desire for separation from the world.
- Because believers have truly left this life on earth and the love which characterizes it, they should now look like those who live in the domain where Christ lives.
- In these 4 verses, Paul explains the nature of the believer’s high calling (**1-2**) and the reasons that the believer is to seek this high calling (**3-4**).
- **Verses 1 and 2** have two very strong commands from Paul...keep seeking things above and set your mind on things above.

- There is an important contrast between these two terms, they speak of the two aspects of a person.
- When Paul says *keep seeking things above*, he has in mind things that we love or the things that we desire in our life.
  - Like Jesus in **Matthew 6:33** “**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...**”
- It’s more than a way of thinking but the things that bring us delight.
- In contrast with this second command which says *set your mind*, which speaks of values. The thing that we value is the thing that we are going to be seeking.
- When we are born again one of the ways that our new nature is shown to the onlooking world (and to us) is our value system changes so the things we seek changes as well.
- **Verses 3-4** gives us two theological reasons that we are to now seek things which are above.
- **Firstly**, we have a new source of life, who is Christ.
  - Once again, Paul brings our new life in Christ to center stage. The source of your new life and the only source which is going to sustain you is Christ Himself.
  - The new life which is energized by Christ enables believers to be and to do what they are commanded from God. the life Christ provides supports believers to seek the things which are identified with their new life.
- **Secondly**, we have a new future that will be manifested in glory.
  - You will, one day, appear with Christ in glory. When Christ is revealed to the onlooking world, all will see the source of believer’s power and the reason they lived as they did.
  - The eyes of the believer must always be on eternity, even though they live in this life.

## **OUR NEW POWER (MORE ON THIS IN THE UPCOMING WEEKS)**

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- We have our new spiritual birth; we are in Christ, and we have new commands. But God does not leave us alone to try and do what He commands. We cannot say no to sin on our own or as our old self.
- **Galatians 2:20** “**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**”
  - Christ now lives in you and because of that you have the faith to live according to the commands of God in the Bible.
  - We live by faith, meaning that we do is because of who we trust. Our saving faith is in God but so is our daily faith for living.
  - We have faith that if we live in the way the Bible prescribes that it will be pleasing to God and good for our soul.

- **1 Corinthians 15:10** “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”
  - Our labor is not because we have enough energy or are cunning enough to say no to sin. It is there because of God’s grace in our life.
  - We must rely on God’s grace to empower us through the battle. This does not negate our own responsibility, but it does mean that when we feel down and out, we need to look to God and His grace in us to keep going.
- **Titus 2:11-12** “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age...”
  - The same grace which saves now empowers the believer to say no to sin and yes to holiness.
  - We now are able to turn from sin...not stopping there...and then turn to righteousness. Not only are we pleasing to God because of what we are not doing, but because of what we are doing.
- **Philippians 2:12-13** “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
  - Our new power comes from the Lord but we still have a responsibility to do what we need to.
  - We are to *work out* our salvation, but it is because God is at work in us so that we can work for His good pleasure. Our work is not aimless but for the good pleasures of God.
  - We are not left with a subjective hope but because God is at work in us and we are doing what we know to be right, our work is pleasing to the Lord.

## **BRIEF EXCURSES: THE STRUGGLE WITH SIN AFTER CONVERSION**

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- Perhaps the looming issue in many minds is how the Christian, being saved, is still tempted to sin. Why do we, being new creations in Christ, still wrestle with the old man...if he is dead?
- The daily task of mortification seems almost to contradict the idea that our flesh is dead.
- The Christian, unlike the average non-Christian, is not indifferent to the weight of sin. He is actually hypersensitive to it. Having come to Jesus Christ, his senses are awakened to the reality of sin. His sensitivity to sin intensifies as he matures spiritually. Such sensitivity prompted a saint as great as Chrysostom, the fourth century church father, to say he feared nothing but sin.<sup>3</sup>
- **Romans 7:14-25** gives us a description of someone who is experiences inner conflict as one who loves God’s law, has a desire to obey it but yet there’s sin which is in him that seems to still rule.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/45SIN/freedom-from-sin>

- I believe Romans 7:14–25 is Paul’s own testimony of how it is to live as a Spirit controlled, mature believer. He loves the holy law of God with his whole heart but finds himself wrapped in human flesh and unable to fulfill it the way he truly desires to.
- In these verses it seems that Paul is describing the most mature of all believers. This is one who honestly measures himself against God’s standards of righteousness and realizes how often they fall short.
- In other words, the closer we get to God the more we see our sin.
- If a man still has two natures after salvation, I believe there are issues which one can’t overcome. Chiefly among them is that of sanctification.
  - Your old nature cannot be sanctified. It cannot be reformed, nor can it be made better. If you still have the old nature, then sanctification is a moot point.
  - Since you have one nature, that from God, you are now able to grow your thoughts, intentions, desires, works, etc. into that new nature.
- “The entrance of the Holy Spirit dispositionally [*sic*] changes a person so that he proceeds down a new path in life. Entrenched patterns of sin and unbelief obscure the way, and they must be rooted out. Yet, he is one person imperfectly living out his one nature. He is no longer a sinner, characterized by wickedness, but a saint. The Reformed view is much more like a dimmer on a light (whereas the 2-nature is like a light switch, off or on). Even in our best moments, we’re not totally free from impurity. Even at our worst, we can still see traces of God’s grace in our lives. Most importantly, this one nature allows room for real progress. That doesn’t mean the fight gets easier, because there are always new battles to face, but it does mean that ground really is won and held. Over a lifetime, others can see this new nature in us, even when we struggle to see it in ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>
- “...Romans 6 and 7 and...the Lord tells us that we are no longer slaves to sin because once a person dies, he is no longer a slave. Death frees him. Through Christ’s death we have been freed from sin’s mastery--we are no longer in slavery to sin. Sin no longer rules or has dominion. We now need to consider ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. Having been freed from sin we now become slaves of righteousness. There was an entity in existence that is no longer in existence. There was a real death, and this was a real transformation. We often hear that when we are converted, we have a new nature added to our old nature. But this is not the language of the New Testament. It is not addition but transformation--the death of one entity and the creation of a new one. The change in you when you were converted is greater than the change will be at your death. Death is simply subtraction.” (Tim Challies’ remarks on MacArthur’s conference speech)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/do-christians-still-have-a-sinful-nature.66397/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/ligonier-national-conference-john-macarthur-we-have-been-raised-but-we-stink>