

MORTIFYING THE FLESH

WEEK 4: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR MORTIFYING SIN PART I

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- 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?
- **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.

THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR FIGHT AGAINST SIN

- As Christians, we are simultaneously sinners and saints. Just one of the man paradoxes of the Christian life.
- We have experienced the new birth (2 Cor. 5:17) and we have been given the Spirit (Rom 8:23).
- Even with those realities, to our dismay and perpetual desire, we still sin.
 - 1 John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”
- “The presence of sin has not disappeared (Romans 6:12). This is the present experience of saints who still sin. We are still able to sin and now able not to sin. Because of the frustrating reality of ongoing sin, we groan with anticipation (Romans 8:23) for the day when we will be gloriously not able to sin. We hope in the day when we will see Christ face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12) and when all things will be made new (Revelation 21:1–8). But in the meantime, we can believe more deeply the indispensable truth that in Christ, we really are able not to sin.”¹
- Augustine (354-430) gave four categories both to establish the Christian’s present fight against sin and to offer hope for future complete freedom from sin.

Neither Pride nor Despair

- As Christians who are keenly aware of their inability to walk in perfect holiness yet their ability to say no to sin, we are constantly in danger of falling into either of these traps...thinking we can defeat sin on our own without God’s help or that we are helpless in our fight against sin.
- **Our pride will deceive us into thinking that we can defeat sin on our own.**
- **Our despair will lie to us as it leads us to think that we can never defeat our besetting sins.**
- We must believe that we have truly been set free from the power of sin but that we also are going to sin this side of eternity.

Your Ability is a Gift

- We must not depend on our own will or grit to just defeat sin in our own strength.
- Fighting sin is not about just remembering Bible verses more or using your time wiser.
- Augustine warns though that man’s “free choice is sufficient for evil, but hardly for good” (sermon 156.12). If we depend on our unassisted will to be good, we will end up addicted to our evil desires.²
- We must not think the other way, that God’s grace is there to empower us to do things easier.
- As if without God’s grace we could still do it, it would just be harder.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christian-you-are-able-not-to-sin>

² Ibid.

- This is Jesus' point in **John 15:5** "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, *for apart from Me you can do nothing.*"
- Jesus did not say that we can do some things with our own grit and desire, He explicitly says that in the Christian life, there is **nothing** you can do apart from the working of the power of Christ.
- "Our ability to fight sin and do good works is a gift, for, as Augustine loved to quote, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Every temptation resisted, every thought captured, every sin killed is accomplished by the grace of the Holy Spirit's power at work in us."³

Your Ability is Real

- We do not sit back and wait for the grace to fight to come to us. We are not robots who are acting under the commands of God, **but we have real grace now for the fight upon us today.**
- Grace renews our minds (Rom 12:2) and restores in us the image of God (Col 3:10) and gives us the ability to really resist sin.
- If we are not truly able to resist sin, then all God demands of the believer and all the commands which He has given us have no meaning. If our ability is not real, then neither are God's instructions for the new life.

Your Ability is Incomplete

- Since we know that we still sin as Christians, this shows us that the ability we have is incomplete.
- Augustine reminds us that "the life of the just in this body is still a warfare, not a triumphal celebration. One day, though, this warfare will have its triumphal celebration. . . . Here is the language of triumph. . . . Death has been swallowed up in victory. Let those celebrating their triumph say, Where, death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54–55; sermon 151.2).
- Although we fight against sin and we continue to sin, we live with hope.
- "...hope that God's grace is sufficient for our fight against sin, hope that the Spirit is renewing us and restoring our ability to fight sin day by day, and finally, hope that we will one day be completely remade."⁴

WE MUST CALL SIN WHAT IT IS.

- I know this sounds strange, but Christians are just as bad at renaming and excusing sin as the unbelieving is at doing it.
- If we are going to kill sin and if we are going to reckon the old man dead, we must be honest about the war that is going on inside of us.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- “Call a spade a spade—call it “sexual immorality,” not “I’m being tempted a little”; call it “impurity,” not “I’m struggling with my thought life”; call it “evil desire, which is idolatry,” not “I think I need to order my priorities a bit better.” This pattern runs right through this whole section. **How powerfully this unmasks self-deceit—and helps us to unmask sin lurking in the hidden corners of our hearts!**”⁵
- In order for us to properly fight sin, we must not let sin reign in our bodies because we refuse to call it what it truly is.
- We must fight the temptation to not talk about sin or to downplay the effect of having unrepentant sin lingering in our hearts and minds.
- In our modern day the evangelical church has taken on moral “relative-ism.” What I mean by that is statistically it has been shown that when a church member has a relative who is committing sin (in this instance abortion, homosexual, adultery, LGBTQ, etc.), they desire to not use the “harsh” Biblical words.⁶
- This trend has led to a mild acceptance (in other words *an acceptance*) of what the Bible calls sin.
- **In order to have God’s results we must do things God’s ways.**
- **Two important questions to deal with when we talk about individual sin:**
- **Are we supposed to find sin ourselves?**
- **2 Corinthians 13:5 “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?”**
- This word *test* is in the imperative, meaning it is a command from Paul. We should be testing ourselves, proving ourselves to see if we are in the faith.
- The other word, *examine* is also an imperative but means *to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve or to deem worthy*.
- What Paul is saying here is look at your life, your full life. The things that you do, the thoughts that you have, the work that is important to you, where you spend your time, your money and any other thing the Lord has blessed you with. What does that look like?
- The same word was used for Abraham in **Hebrews 11:17 “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son...”**
- God tested Abraham, would he give up the promised son or did he love the promise more than the promise maker. Abraham, as we know, passed the test.
- *What Paul is saying is, do you? Is there sin which hinders you from fully serving the Lord?*

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/how-mortify-sin>

⁶ Alter Mohler, *The Briefing*, aired 05/01/2023.

- **Are we supposed to call out sin in others?**

- The answer to this is both yes and no.
- 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 **“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you **not to associate with any so-called brother** if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? **Do you not judge those who are within the church?** But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”**
- In **verse 9**, Paul says that believers are not supposed to associate with immoral people.
- He clarifies what he means by saying that it is not the immoral people of the world (otherwise you would not be able to function), but those who are in the church...or the *so-called brothers*.
- We are called to judge those who are in the church and God judges those outside the church.
- This is to keep the church pure and so that people will have an assurance of their eternal destiny.
- Galatians 6:1 **“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”**
- We are to go to our brothers who are in sin and seek to restore them back from where they have fallen.
- This is not talking about saving sinners but getting those who call themselves Christians back on the path of sanctification.
- We need to not only have courage to warn someone who is in sin but also the humility to be able to allow someone to tell us we are.

Our sin before our Holy God

- “When we sin, we want to describe our sinful activity in terms of a mistake, as if that softens or mitigates the guilt involved. We think of mistakes as being part of the human condition. ...if one of us is wrong, it would be because he came to the Scriptures while wanting it to agree with him, rather than wanting to agree with the Scriptures. We tend to come biased, and we distort the very Word of God to escape the judgment that comes from it.”⁷
- When we don’t call sin in the way that God does, we lessen the affront it is to God. As Sproul rightly says, it is done because we think that it will somehow lessen the judgement from God upon us.
- God does not allow sin to be defined by mankind nor sin to be unpunished.

⁷ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/holiness-god-and-sinfulness-man>

- James 1:15-16 “Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; **and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.** Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”
- Psalm 50:21 “These things you have done and I kept silence; **You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.**”
 - By this alarming language the Psalmist aims at convincing them of the certainty of destruction should they longer presume upon the forbearance of God, and thus provoke his anger the more, by imagining that he can favour the practice of sin.⁸
- Just because we have renamed our sins and just because God has not *immediately* judged us of our sin, does not mean that God supports our sin. This brings about a false peace in our own minds, as if God is like us and thinks of sin like us.
- John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; **but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**”
- Our obedience to God’s Word is directly related to our eternal destination. If we continue a life of unrepentant sin (or approve of such **Rom 1:32**), we can be sure that we do not have life.

WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE ABOUT OUR NEW LIFE?

- Romans 6:6-7 “...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”
- Since we are no longer slaves to sin and free from the power of sin, we have new commands which we are empowered to follow in our Christian life.
- Romans 6:11-12 “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts...”
 - To *consider* that you are dead to sin is a command, an imperative from Paul. It means to *reckon*, to *count* or to *determine*.
 - The word that Paul uses carries with it the sense in which the person is acting upon themselves. This means that the Christian is to think to themselves the truth that they know.
 - In other words, the believer must fully consider or reckon themselves to be dead to sin so that they are able to not allow sin to reign in their bodies.
- If you do not think, believe or trust that you are dead to sin, then you are not going to act like someone who is dead to sin.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 278.

- Do you believe what the Bible says about your new life in Christ? Do you believe that your sin can actually be fought against and that you can actually have victory over it?
- We must not fall into the trap of thinking this a once off thought or action in our life. This is what the continual battle looks like, but it starts with believing that you are dead to sin so that you don't obey it.
- **Romans 6:18** "...and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."
- **Since we are free from sin, we are now free to serve Christ.** We are no longer slaves to sin but we are slaves to righteousness. We can now make real decisions that not only are good but pleasing to the Lord.
- Our new master is Christ Himself and He says in **Matthew 11:30** "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Salvation involves submission and Christ is not the Lord over those who do not obey Him.
- Christ gives us true rest as we submit to Him and His commands. His yoke is easy and burden light.
- Jesus was contrasting His burden with the Pharisee's legalistic approach they put on the people.
- We have the same promise today. Christ is not demanding anything that brings oppression or give us something that is too heavy to carry.
- **1 John 5:3** "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."
- "Submission to Jesus Christ brings the greatest liberation a person can experience – actually the *only* true liberation he can experience, **because only through Christ is he freed to become what God created him to be.**"⁹

WE MUST FULLY RELY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- Once we have identified the sin our life, it is time to kill or mortify it. As Augustine said earlier, this is not through the power of our own will or desire, but through the working of the Holy Spirit in us.
- To be able to live the life which Christ paid for, we must use the resources which He gave...namely the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus said in **John 14:16-17** "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."
- To rely on the Holy Spirit does not mean that we don't have a part to play. Our life is not "let go and let God." **We will never cease from striving and struggling.**
- This teaching believes that we are to adopt some kind of spiritual inactivity where we do nothing to change but simply allow the Spirit to work.

⁹ John MacArthur, *Matthew Commentary*, p. 277.

- This is not only an unbiblical teaching but one that is very dangerous.
- **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.”
- In contrast, John Owens says “The principle efficient cause of the performance of this duty [that is, killing of the sin in our life] is the Spirit ... All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit.”
- You are not in this fight alone. You must put in effort, but it is the Spirit Who is empowering you to do so.

General Means the Holy Spirit Works Through in Our Life

- In case you think sanctification is simply an exercise in theological research, Sinclair Ferguson says, “Of all the doctrines surrounding the Christian life this, one of the profoundest, is also one of the most practical in its effects”¹⁰
- 5 Factors Towards Our Sanctification:¹¹
- **God.** “It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13)
- **Truth.** The truth of God’s word taught, sung, preached, studied, and read is one of the surest means by which the Spirit brings about change in our lives.
- **Wise people.** God mediates our change “through the gifts and graces of brothers and sisters in Christ.”
- **Suffering and struggle.** Though we don’t relish it, suffering and struggles work towards our growth in Christlikeness. Difficulties prompt us to rely on God. Writes Powlison: “People change because something is hard, not because it goes well . . . Struggles force us to need God.”
- **You change.** Scripture calls us to actively believe, obey, trust, seek, love, confess, praise, and take refuge. We are not passive...we are 100% responsible, yet 100% dependent on outside help.
- **We must remember that the Sanctification process is slow.** This can be because we are resisting the work of the Spirit in our life. We may not be submitting to the work of the Spirit and trying to reason our sin away.
- This will slow or stop the process of sanctification in our life as we wrestle through the issues. This could possibly result in a season of dryness or weariness in our walk with the Lord.
- Our sanctification process can also seem slow because we must remember that our entire humanness was infected with sin.
- Therefore, the Spirit is working but there may be many areas or aspects that need to be tended to. He is going to work through it all, but it just may be a lot.

¹⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, 114.

¹¹ David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work*, pp. 61-69