

MORTIFYING THE FLESH

WEEK 5: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR MORTIFYING SIN PART II

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 and live for Christ.
- 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 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEMPTATION AND SIN

- No way out. Who hasn't felt the force of these words in the midst of bitterness, lust, or a thousand other temptations? And who hasn't succumbed to their dark suggestion? If some lies have slain their thousands, this lie has slain its ten thousands.¹
- It is apparent that many in the church at Corinth felt as if they were trapped by temptation and no way out except to sin. Corinth was known for boasting, lust, idols, vanity and a host of other sin that was widely practice and publicly accepted.
- To the Corinthians, perhaps there seemed no way to be free from the sin following their temptation.
- But Paul said in **1 Corinthians 10:13** “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”
- We have to fully understand that every temptation has a way out, it's escapable.
- In this passage, Paul says four key points about temptation...
- **There are no unique temptations:**
 - Whatever pressure or pull we feel, saints of the past and present have felt the same. And God promises to all: there is a way out.
- **You are frail:**
 - The humble know that every step forward towards sin will make steps backward harder.
 - They take heed at the very start, asking for help, rehearsing promises, running to prayer, fearing delay.
- **Escaping your temptation will probably be hard:**
 - John Owen offers a graphic picture of what resisting sin may require: “Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts” (Works of John Owen, 6:14). Sometimes, taking God's way of escape feels like trampling desires that don't want to die.²
- **God won't leave you:**
 - The waves of temptation, however high or strong, have a God-decreed shoreline.³

The Source and Guilty Party for Our Temptation

- We have two roads that make their way into our hearts that bring temptation...Satan and our own desires.
- **What does it look like when Satan brings temptation:**

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sin-is-never-inevitable>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- Acts 5:3-4 “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? *Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.*”
- The temptation to lie came from Satan but the fault of the sin was laid on them.
- Perhaps the lie was that they wanted people to think more highly of them for giving the most money. This was something that Satan put in their hearts, he set an idol there and they worshipped it by lying to Peter.
- **What about our own desires?**
- James 1:13-15 “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. **But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**”
- We still, as born-again believers, have some sin lingering in our hearts and minds. It does not take the prompting of Satan to get idols popping up in our hearts.
- **Temptation is not sin.** Temptation turns into sin when we give into the temptation and act upon the thing that our sin desires us to do.
- This is where Jesus came head-to-head with the Pharisees. Lust is a sin, even if it is never physically acted upon because to lust is to already want something that you don’t have.
- They are sin because we are now entertaining those thoughts, thinking of what life would be like if we had the thing we don’t. **We are acting out the scenario in our minds, even if not in person.**
- For example, we may desire something or something comes into our minds. If we are to take that thought captive and put it off and submit it to Scripture, then we are not sinning.
- But, if we take that thought and start to entertain it, play with it and really desire it...it goes from temptation to sin very quickly.

OUR 1ST PRACTICAL STEP: 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.
- **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"⁴
- 5 Factors Towards Our Sanctification:⁵
- **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.

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, 114.

⁵ David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work*, pp. 61-69

- 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.

OUR 2ND PRACTICAL STEP: SIN IS INCONSISTENT WITH OUR NEW LIFE

- **When you sin, it is inconsistent with who you now are in Christ.**
- **Romans 5:19 “For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”**
- We were, before being saved by Christ, in Adam, or classified as sinners.
- Now, as those who have been born again, we have been made righteous in Christ.
- **For us to sin is to act like the old man, to act like we are still in Adam and have not been renewed in Christ.**
- New men live new lives, for us to do otherwise is a contradiction to our new life.
- **Each time we sin we are effectively telling God that we desire our way instead of His.** That we think our way is the way to life and holiness and that His way is second best.
- **When we sin, we are acting like Adam in disobedience to the commands of God.**
- **1 John 2:3-6 “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”**
- These are some very hard words from John that we need to take into our own hearts.
- **If we say that we are born again, what John is saying is that our life needs to back that up.**
- He’s not talking about perfection but the one who is striving to keep their life according to Christ.
- As we think about mortifying or killing our sin, we must know that by following the commands of Christ we are going to be automatically killing sin in our lives.
- Our desire should be to live a life in which we *walk in the same manner* as Christ walked.
- **How do we know what God commands of us so that we may walk in them?**
- We must be willing to read and study the Scriptures.
- There is nothing that God desires for us that can be found outside of the Bible. All that He not only has for us but also has given to us is in the Bible. We truly need nothing more.

- God is not hiding something from you or keeping some subtle truth from you, He wants you to grow in godliness and holiness and He has given you the tools to succeed.
- We should never doubt if God is for us, if we are born again, we know that God is on our side and He desires us to live according to His Word.
- **If there is something we don't understand it is not the Bible's fault but our own obstructed vision.**
- We have everything, we just have to be willing to use it.

OUR 3RD PRACTICAL STEP: PUT-OFF SIN AND PUT-ON CHRIST

- **The Christian life is often times mistaken for a life of self-denial.**
- Christians so often speak of their spiritual life in terms of what they are *not doing*.
- I gave up something or I don't watch or listen to or read something.
- **We define ourselves as Christians by what is lacking in our life.**
- **Listen to how the Bible describes the sinner turned saint:**
- **Ephesians 4:28 "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."**
 - The one who steals is not classified as a former thief or one who does not steal. Rather, he is now known as the one who labors (instead of steals) for the purpose of having something to share with those who need it.
 - The ones who usually steal are the ones who are in need, so the former thief is now helping others, so they are not tempted to steal as he did.
- This is a classic case of putting off and putting one. There is no longer the sin of stealing (as the old man in Adam was classified) but now there is the *doing* work *and* practically loving the neighbor who is also someone who is in need.
- Listen to **Ephesians 4:29 "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."**
 - The exhortation is not just to stop with unwholesome words, but to replace those words with ones that are edifying and give grace to the hearers.
 - Paul does not just say *stop talking with corrupt or worthless words!* That does not classify a Christian. Anyone can stop using worthless words.
 - Be he says not only stop with the worthless words, but now speak with words that are going to be edifying to those who hear.
 - Once again, just like the one who stole was to be a blessing to the people in need, true Christian love looks around and acts as Christ did.

- Here in **verse 29**, the words are for others, to edify them...to build them up or to promote someone's growth in their Christian walk.
 - Notice too that it is not just general edification, but Paul says *to the need of the moment*.
 - We are to know the words that we are saying and make sure that they are actually needed when we are saying them. There is a direct purpose, those who hear us should receive grace.
- Your actions and your speech are not so much about what you are not doing but what you are doing and how you are blessing those who are around you.
 - The Christian life is not about emptying but about filling.
 - We don't strive to empty our minds and be free of thought but we want to be filled with the Spirit so that we are able to live like Christ.

Colossians 3:1-17

- Paul starts with the simple statement about those who have been born again.
- **Verses 1-4** ¹Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."
- **Before Paul even gets to what sin we are to mortify and what we are to put in its place, he talks about what has been done and what we must do because of that.**
- As Christians, we are to *keep seeking the thing above* and *set your mind on things above*. The reason for this is in **verse 3**...*you have died and your life is hidden with Christ*.
- The reason we are to put off the old man and the put on the new is twofold...the old man is dead and we are now alive in Christ.
- If this is your new reality, you are going to be searching after the things of God. You will no longer be like the old man in your thinking, but you will start to look more and more like the new man.
- He also talks about how it is all going to end by connecting our current walk or lifestyle with our eternal standing. If we are *in Christ*, we are going to look like Christ and therefore be in glory with Him.
- **Verses 5-11** ⁵Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead** to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶**For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,** ⁷**and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.** ⁸But now you also, **put them all aside:** anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new self **who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One**

who created him ¹¹a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”

- There's a long list here to consider! Our old man and his old ways were all against God.
- Notice that Paul starts with *consider the members of your earthly body as dead*.
- Here is that *consider* again, this time it is a little different.
- The actual Greek word is νεκρώω (where we get necromancy in English) which means *to deaden or cause to cease completely...to put to death*. This is also in the **imperative**, it's a command from Paul.
- This is based upon **verse 3**, *for you have died...*so the truth is you have died and now you have to believe that truth and walk in that truth.
- **Verses 5-11** show us what the “alive” dead man looked like so that if we see any of these traits, we can be sure we are acting like that dead man.
- Notice also again the theme of obedience in Paul's writing. Why is wrath coming upon those who are walking in sin? He says it is because they are *sons of disobedience*.
- Our obedience (remember **Rom 5:19** and **1 John 2:3-6**) is directly linked again to our eternal salvation and standing before the Lord. This is how you used to be, not who you are now, you now obey what the Word says to you.
 - This obedience is not done to earn God's favor or hope to somehow get in good standing with Him.
 - It is so important to realize that Paul is saying this *after* he has already said what has been done for you.
 - Essentially you can summarize what Paul says: Christ died for you, you have outwardly shown that you have repented and put your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Your new life is in Christ and you will show the world this new life by how you are currently living.
- **Verse 10** is a great verse for hope... *who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*.
 - This verb used for *is being renewed* is actually in the passive state. Here is what Paul is saying, as you are killing the sin in your body, your active duty, you are being renewed more and more into the image of Christ.
 - You are not striving to be renewed but this is happening to you as you are living your Christian life in the new man.
 - You are becoming more and more Christlike as you are putting off the old ways of living.
 - This is a great encouragement for us. This is the power of the Holy Spirit working in us as we are working in our own lives.