

### **Romans (38): Putting to Death the deeds of the Body**

Today we will begin to give our attention to the message and implications of Romans 8:12-17. I suspect that we will be here a few weeks. After Paul had been addressing various aspects of the believer's sanctification, that is, his growth in grace and holiness, here Paul becomes specific in his instruction. Let us read **Romans 8:12-17**.

<sup>12</sup>So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup>For 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. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

In this passage of Romans 8 we read of how essential it is to our salvation that we become sanctified (vs. 12, 13). Our sanctification is one of the chief ways in which we may be assured that we have a saving relationship with God (v. 14). The Holy Spirit has enabled us to call upon God as our Father (v.15). The Holy Spirit Himself assures us that we are God's children and that we have a glorious inheritance in our share of what is Christ's (vs. 16f). We will first examine the substance of Paul's comments and then we will consider how we may defeat sin in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

#### **I. Our Sanctification is essential to our Salvation (8:12f).**

Paul had made a number of declarations respecting the privileged blessings God had given and promised to "those who are in Christ Jesus." There is no condemnation to them, for God has not only justified them by grace through faith alone, rendering them righteous in their standing before God. But there was no condemnation due them also because God had purposed to sanctify them, to make them holy or righteous in the manner in which they lived (Rom. 8:1f). God had set them free from the law that condemned them and had bound them in their sin. For although the law of God is itself holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12), it was unable to make God's people holy. The law of God revealed what God's righteousness was, but it could not produce righteousness in believers. But what the law could not do, God did through sending His Son to be the Savior of His people. Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the sin of believers was condemned. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, whom the Son gives to His people, God is able to sanctify His people; He is able to transform His people so that they may live according to the righteousness revealed in His law and as was lived out through Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you are in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit who is in you will give you life both now and at the future resurrection. Because of all that God has done and has provided for believers, Paul declared in **verses 12**, "***So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.***" God's grace toward us and in us has made us debtors not to live according to the flesh. In other words, as Christians, God has not saved us that we continue to live as "debtors" to the flesh, that is, to pay a debt to sin by serving sin. Our debt to sin was paid fully by Jesus Christ. Our debt to sin no longer exists. What Paul therefore implies in verse 12, but does not state forthrightly, is that we are debtors to God's grace to live in righteousness.

In **verse 13** Paul declares a further reason why we are not debtors to live in order to sin. "***For 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.***" Here Paul presents one sentence with two conditional statements. The **first** statement declares that ***the one who lives governed by sin, will die in his sins condemned before God.*** This is how the unbeliever

orders his life. This verse declares the same outcome that Paul had declared in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death.” This is the certain outcome of any and all who live their lives “according to the flesh”, that is, they lived their lives governed by their own sinful desires rather than governed by the Lord Jesus Christ. This describes all non-Christians. This describes all nominal Christians, those who are Christian in name only, but are not Christian not in the manner that they live. The *second* statement is worded positively. ***The one who lives governed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live righteously, while defeating sin in his life, will live.*** He will live blessed by God in this life and he will enjoy eternal life when his life in this world comes to an end.

Here we see yet another place in God’s Word that declares that a person who is justified through faith alone in Jesus Christ will also be a person who is being sanctified from sin unto holiness through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God sent His Son to save us both from the penalty of sin (justification) and from the power of sin (sanctification). Our sanctification is not optional. It is an absolute necessity. You will not live if you continue to order your life in sin; but you will most certainly “live” if “***by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.***” As the apostle declared, “***For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God***” (8:14). To be “led” by the Spirit of God is to live as you are putting to death the deeds of the body, that is, you stop living for sin.

Human beings must summon and harness their wills in order to overcome sin, which bubbles up within us and desires to manifest itself in bodily actions. The squelching of sinful impulses is not finally attributed, however, to the agency of will power. The paradox of Paul’s thought must be noted in verse 13. Those who “live” according to the flesh will “die.” But those who “put to death” the deeds of the body “will live.” Victory is by means of the Spirit, which means that believers conquer sinful passions by relying on and trusting in the Spirit to provide the strength to resist the passions that wage war within us.<sup>1</sup>

In order to underscore the importance of this matter let us consider more carefully the truths presented here. ***First, let us affirm that the ones that Paul addressed here he assumed were justified persons.*** He was speaking to Christians. And yet we would acknowledge that although these conditional statements are directed directly for Christians, they are truisms for non-Christians as well. But only justified Christians may fulfill the conditions that Paul set forth in these verses. Paul had described these ones he was addressing in **verse 9**, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.” Only justified people have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. Only they have the grace from God to “***put to death the deeds of the body***” ***by the Holy Spirit.*** And so, this instruction is not given directly to the unbeliever, although it is true for the unbeliever. The unbeliever is not told to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, for the unbeliever is void of the Spirit. The unbeliever is told to repent of sin and turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to believe on Jesus as the only Savior from sin who lived and died as the sinner’s substitute. And so, this instruction in Romans 8:13 is given directly to the Christian, and only indirectly to the non-Christian. And so understand, this is a duty that is incumbent upon every Christian. “***For 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***” (Rom. 8:13). The KJV describes this action in this manner: “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

***Second***, we have reinforced once again in these words that ***sin is presently alive to a degree in every justified person.*** You are forgiven, but sin still is still in you. If it were not present, it would not need to be put to death. But the fact that that you still live in this body of death, you have sin to mortify, to put to death.

***Third***, take not that ***it is a continual action that we are to take.*** This is not a call to make a one time decision or perform a single act. He did not say, “if you ***have put to death*** the deeds of the body”, but “if by the Spirit you ***put to death*** the deeds of the body.” He is prescribing continual activity. This is a way of life for the true Christian. You never arrive to a place of completion or perfection in this life. Every day you wake up you have a task before you as a Christian, “***if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***”

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 421f.

We must not rest in a mortification already wrought in us. He saith not, “If ye have mortified,” but, “If ye do mortify;” this must be our daily practice, not done now and then, or by fits; if we always sincerely labour to mortify the deeds of the body, we are in the way of life.<sup>2</sup>

**Fourth**, this work of putting to death the deeds of the body is a work that *must be deliberate and thorough*. This work of grace that we see conducted in our lives is not to be attended to half-heartedly, carried along with only partial effort with partial results. It is not a command to cause sin to be weakened or lessened in us, but we are to put *to death* the deeds of the body. We are to fight against sin using the spiritual weapons that God has provided us to enable us to oppose the enemy so as to slay it. We are to root it out, not merely suppress it or cause it to be less than it once was.

**Fifth**, Paul’s words suggest that *this work is a great struggle, even spiritual warfare*. The flesh will not easily be put down. It seems to live and want to live. And the longer you let it continue in your life, the stronger that it will resist dying. “The longer you suffer this Canaanite to live with you, the more will it prove as a thorn or goad in your sides.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul described our sins as *“the deeds of the body.”* He did so because our sins are sometimes described in the Scriptures as though it were a body. In Romans 7:24, Paul had written, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” This speaks of our physical body as the instrument through which sin finds expression. Also in Colossians 2:11, “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” This “body” is the manner in which our sin is expressed or manifested.

There is the head of wicked desires, the hands and feet of wicked executions, the eye of sinful lusts, the tongue of vain and evil words; therefore it is said, (Col. 3:5), ‘Mortify your members which are upon earth;’ not of the natural body, but of the mass of corruption; particular sinful lusts are as members of this body.<sup>4</sup>

We may better understand what we are to do when we consider *what it is we are not to do*. There is a *“pagan mortification”* that is a poor substitute to putting to death the deeds of the body. Romans 2:14 describes what some unbelieving Gentiles practiced a measure of morality even though they had never been exposed to the revealed Word of God. “The Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law.” In other words, even unformed Gentiles would sometimes abstain from gross acts of sin and seek to perform what they thought were acts of goodness. But this is not putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. Mere morality and striving not to participate in gross sin is not to be understood as fulfilling what God has revealed to us through Paul’s words. Some will try to live “moral” lives, but that is not what Paul was advocating.

There is also *superstitious mortification*. Some will voluntarily deny themselves of something enjoyable and pleasurable and then think that they are denying themselves and mortifying the flesh before God. But if God has not commanded in His Word to take these actions, then it is mere superstition and is less than beneficial. even damning. It only fosters delusions of having pleased God. The Roman Catholic practice of Lent, abstaining from marriage, abstaining from eating meat, all these kinds of activities may be termed superstitious efforts performed by those who wrongly believe (because they have been taught wrongly) that these actions are pleasing to God and bring spiritual benefit to themselves. Paul wrote in Colossians

<sup>20</sup>If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- <sup>21</sup>“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup>(referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup>These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:20:23)

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 12, p. 56

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

And then there is *the mortification of the hypocrite*. This is an outward denying of evil while before the eyes of others, but there is no inward hate of sin. They turn from some sins, but they do so for other than reasons for attaining true holiness before God. They perhaps want the good opinion of others. Perhaps they only desire to have a clear conscience with respect to themselves, and not before God. Sometimes the only reason the hypocrite does not sin more egregiously than he does is because he lacks the opportunity. There may be a kind of mortification of some sins, but not of others. We must desire to obey God fully without reservation. **Spurgeon** once wrote of the evidence of true conversion in being total surrender to the Lord of one's life.

There must also be a *willingness to obey the Lord in all His commandments*. It is a shameful thing for a man to profess discipleship and yet refuse to learn his Lord's will upon certain points, or even dare to decline obedience when that will is known. How can a man be a disciple of Christ when he openly lives in disobedience to Him?

If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows his Lord's will but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumption, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Has not the Lord said, "He that taketh not up his cross, and cometh after Me, cannot be My disciple"? Mistakes as to what the Lord's will may be are to be tenderly corrected, but anything like willful disobedience is fatal; to tolerate it would be treason to Him that sent us. Jesus must be received as King as well as Priest; and where there is any hesitancy about this, the foundation of godliness is not yet laid.

"Faith must obey her Maker's will  
As well as trust His grace  
A pardoning God is jealous still  
For His own holiness."<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes the only reason the hypocrite does not sin more egregiously than he does is because he lacks the opportunity. It is not a hatred for sin that prevents him, but the occasion has not presented itself. And then there are also those who do not go into flagrant sin because of natural fear, but not the fear of God. Or they are "good" only as they are influenced by others who are "good." But when the good influence is gone, the true character comes forth. Some are restrained while under the influence of good parents, a good church, or even a good friend. But when that influence ends, so does the good behavior. We read of this in the case of **Jehoash**.

In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. <sup>2</sup>And ***Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.*** (2 Kings 12:1f)

But then we read later,

<sup>15</sup>***But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and died.*** He was 130 years old at his death. <sup>16</sup>And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and his house.

<sup>17</sup>***Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them.*** <sup>18</sup>And they abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. <sup>19</sup>Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Eerdmans' 1974)

<sup>20</sup>Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’” (2 Chron. 24:15-21)

The abstinence from sin and the performance of good by this king was temporary. It spanned some years. But it was only temporary. Take away the influence, and then his own bent and preference will be affected or influenced by others.

There are other reasons that others other than Christians do not indulge in sin. God Himself *restrains* people from sinning even though they may not know Him. He may hold men back from sinning through the influence of His Word upon their consciences even though He had never renewed their hearts. We read of God keeping **Abimelech** from sinning, even though he was a pagan man.

From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. <sup>2</sup>And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

<sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife.”

<sup>4</sup>Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, “Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup>Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.”

<sup>6</sup>Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.” (Gen. 20:1-6)

Now, having considered what it not is to put to death the deeds of the body, we may understand better *what it is we are to do*. But first let us acknowledge the work of grace in us to enable us to put to death the deeds of the body. *First*, we acknowledge that we are even now able to put to death the deeds of the body for *God has already performed a work of grace* in us that is contrary to sin and actively opposes it. We live in the days of fulfillment of much of what the prophets foretold. God said of His people that in the age of the Messiah that He would give them His Spirit causing them to depart from sin and to live for righteousness. God had said,

<sup>19</sup>And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup>that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezek. 11:19f)

And also in Ezekiel 36 God declared:

<sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:25-27)

But **second**, not only did God initially give us grace in the new nature that He gave us at conversion, but *He continually gives us grace whereby we might live before Him*. He weakens the power of sin in the lives of his people as they grow in grace. Micah described God's dealings with His people.

<sup>18</sup>Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love. <sup>19</sup>He will again have compassion on us; *He will tread our iniquities underfoot*. You will cast all our sins into the depths

of the sea. <sup>20</sup>You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as You have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (Micah 7:18-20)

**John Bunyan** wrote of this work of grace in the soul as a secret unseen thing even to Christians. But is a reality. Here was his effort to illustrate this truth in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Then I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter.

Then said Christian, 'What means this?'

The Interpreter answered, 'This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart: he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the devil; but in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that.' So he had him about to the backside of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, (but secretly) into the fire.

Then said Christian, 'What means this?'

The Interpreter answered, 'This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. 2 Corinthians 12:9. And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, that is to teach thee that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul.'

God performs this on working grace in us largely *through the instrument of His Word*. Our Lord prayed to His Father regarding this: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). We are to be in the Word of God continually. God administers grace to the hearers. We are to speak to one another in this same way. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). Of course no corrupt word has ever come from the mouth of God, for every Word of God imparts grace to its hearers.

God also governs our lives in *providence* so as to keep us from places that we would fall. He wills for us to be in places and have contact with people that would tend toward our advancement in grace. He causes us trials and hardships to purify us and resort more frequently and completely to Him. In John 15:2 Jesus said, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." But further, when we stray from Him He chastens us so as to wean us from our sin. We are always to remember this, for if we forget, we may become weary and discouraged.

<sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." <sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup>If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup>Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup>For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup>For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup>Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (Heb. 13:4-12)

We can read of how God used *His judgment* upon Israel in order to purge them from their sins. Of the Assyrian enemy that would ravage the land, He said,

Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing. (Isa. 27:9)

Through this work of grace that God has performed in us and His work of providence by which He governs us, we may say that we are having sin *passively* mortified in us. God is doing this work.

But what the apostle sets before us in Romans 8:13 is that of *active mortification*; he sets forth the action that each of us as a believer are to perform in order to defeat sin in our lives. ***“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”***

Active mortification is the constant endeavour of a renewed soul to subdue sin dwelling in us, that we may be more at liberty to serve, please, and glorify God.<sup>6</sup>

Our mortification of our sin must be done continuously, for we continuously have this sin problem within. There are large ships that have bilge pumps continually pumping because their hulls have continuous leaks. We have sin that is in us that would sooner or later overcome us and cause us to sink if it were not for our efforts to put to death the deeds of the body. It is our every day duty and business. We must not, cannot leave off this responsibility or we will soon find ourselves floundering.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Gal. 5:17)

We groan under sin and we desire the day to come when we will pass from this life and experience the full glory of God, the day when we will no longer need to struggle and fight to seek recovery and restoration.

And so we are to actively and aggressively “put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit.” This verse alone repudiates the false view of sanctification that we spoke about some time ago. The popular evangelical understanding of sanctification is that the believer is to be wholly passive. This is how I described this Keswick view of sanctification not long ago. Those who hold to this understanding of the christian life teach that

A Christian must cease to exert all personal effort, and trust Christ alone to do work in him. Any effort to keep God’s commands or any inclination of duty or responsibility to do so is to be avoided, for that is self-effort, and doomed to failure. Thus, the Christian is to be passive. If the Christian tries to resist directly the urges to sin, he will fail. Things like commands and practical instruction are counter-productive, for we do not have the ability to do the things God commands us; the life we lead must be by faith: It is He who lives His life through us.” “Let go and let God.” “Rest” in Him. “Let Him take over.”<sup>7</sup>

Romans 8:13 clearly repudiates this view of complete passivity, for it describes purposeful activity on the part of the Christian.

***This work must be thorough*** work on our part. We are to be aggressively putting to death sins in our life day after day. Paul had set whole lists of sins before Christians. **Colossians 3:8** reads, “Put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouths, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” We also read in **Ephesians 4**:

<sup>20</sup>But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- <sup>21</sup>assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup>to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of

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<sup>6</sup> Manton, vol. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Sermon #FBC689, delivered on December 9, 2012.

life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup>Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup>Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup>Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:20-32)

There are two ways in which we may attack our sins in order to defeat them and put them to death. One way is to starve it *indirectly*, the other is to assault it *directly*. (1) We may attack our sins indirectly by *starving our sin* so that it cannot continue in us. It is like causing a fire to go out. You can extinguish the fire by removing either the fuel or the oxygen, those things necessary for fire to exist. So we are to remove ourselves from influences and places where we would be vulnerable, subject to temptation to sin against God. Romans 13:14 reads, “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Some Christians sin much more than they would otherwise because they have made allowance to be in a place where they are able to sin or they have retained the implements by which they may sin. There are some sins you will not commit if you are not in the place or in which those sins easily occur. Some have made provision for the flesh so that they can sin quite easily because of the easy access of pornography through the internet or television. Pornography leads to great sin and the internet is all too available to some who have no business having private access to it.

The other means is to employ a *direct* assault against sins using the means of grace that God has given to us. (2) We are to resort to *prayer*. We are to pray continuously. Bunyan portrayed his character, Christian, as having to fight against the devil and sin as he traveled to the Celestial City. Christian would use the Word of God as a sword to fight off his enemy, but at times he had to resort to the means of prayer.

I saw then in my dream, so far as this valley reached, there was on the right hand a very deep ditch; that ditch is it into which the blind have led the blind in all ages, and have both there miserably perished. Again, behold, on the left hand, there was a very dangerous quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he can find no bottom for his foot to stand on. Into that quag King David once did fall, and had no doubt therein been smothered, had not He that is able plucked him out. Psalm 69:14.

The pathway was here also exceeding narrow, and therefore good Christian was the more put to it; for when he sought, in the dark, to shun the ditch on the one hand, he was ready to tip over into the mire on the other; also when he sought to escape the mire, without great carefulness he would be ready to fall into the ditch. Thus he went on, and I heard him here sigh bitterly; for, besides the dangers mentioned above, the pathway was here so dark, and oftentimes, when he lift up his foot to set forward, he knew not where or upon what he should set it next.

About the midst of this valley, I perceived the mouth of hell to be, and it stood also hard by the wayside. ‘Now,’ thought Christian, ‘what shall I do?’ And ever and anon the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises, (things that cared not for Christian's sword, as did Apollyon before,) that he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to *another weapon called All-prayer*, Ephesians 6:18; So he cried, in my hearing, ‘O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.’ Psalm 116:4. Thus he went on a great while, yet still the flames would be reaching towards him. Also he heard doleful voices, and rushings to and fro, so that sometimes he thought he should be torn in pieces, or trodden down like mire in the streets. This frightful sight was seen, and these dreadful noises were heard by him for several miles together; and, coming to a place where he thought he heard a company of fiends coming forward to meet him, he stopped, and began to muse what he had best to do. Sometimes he had half a thought to go back; then again he thought he might be half way through the valley; he remembered also how he had already vanquished many a danger, and that the danger of going

back might be much more than for to go forward; so he resolved to go on. Yet the fiends seemed to come nearer and nearer; but when they were come even almost at him, he cried out with a most vehement voice, 'I will walk in the strength of the Lord God.' So they gave back, and came no further.

And certainly our *faith* is one of the chief means that God has given us to overcome sin in our lives. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith" (1 John 5:4). In faith we humble ourselves before the Lord and trust Him to deliver us from our sins that fight against us. James wrote of this life of faith:

Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup>Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:7ff)

And once again, this must be done daily, because sin is continually at work in us. If you neglect to employ the means of grace that God has med for you, you will be overcome by sin. And in the end, you will not live.

I will conclude with more words of exhortation from the puritan, **Thomas Manton**.

The daily course is needful, because sin is at continual work in our hearts; and as soon as a christian neglects his soul, the effects do soon appear. In this sense, a Cchristian must die daily, that is, to his sins and corruptions; he must still watch, and strive, and get some advantage against them, by every prayer he maketh to God, every act of receiving the Lord's Supper, or hearing the word; it is his constant task.<sup>8</sup>

Consider "the sad consequence of letting sin alone. When sin is not mortified, it groweth outrageous, and never ceaseth acting it till hath exposed us to shame before God, men, and angels; or hardeneth us in a carnal, careless course. Lusts let alone end in gross sins, and gross sins in a casting off all religion. Love of pleasures let alone, will end in drunkenness and uncleanness; envy, in murder and violence. Judas allowed his covetousness, and that brought him to betray his master; Gehazi was first blasted with covetousness, then with asking a bribe to God's dishonour, then with leprosy, and so became a shame and burden to himself; Ananias and Sapphira were taken off by a sudden judgment. The devil loveth by lust to draw us into sin; and by sin to shame; and by shame to horror and despair. Sin is no tame thing. But do the people of God run into such notable excesses and disorders? Yes, when they let sin alone, and discontinue the exercise of mortification; witness David, that run into lust and blood ; and Peter into curses and execrations; Solomon into sensuality and idolatry. Old sins long laid asleep may awaken again, and hurry us strangely into mischief and inconvenience...

The abundance of sin of all kinds that remaineth with the regenerate, or those that are called to grace. I shall evidence that by some scriptures: 1 Pet. 2:1, 'Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speaking;' to whom is this spoken? The word *wherefore* biddeth us look back; when we look back, we find it was spoken to those that were called, effectually called, and born again; yea, those that had made some progress in mortification, that had purified their hearts to the obedience of the truth, 1 Pet. 1:22. Who would think that the seeds of so much evil should lurk in their hearts? but alas! It is so. They are in part envious, malicious, hypocritical to the last; and unless they shall keep mortifying, these sins will get the mastery of them, and bewray themselves to their loss and prejudice, and God's dishonour. See another place: Col. iii. 5, 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' You would think all this were spoken to loose and ungoverned men, that have not the least tincture and show of religion. No; it is spoken of those whose life was hidden with

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<sup>8</sup> Manton, vol. 12, p. 60.

God in Christ, men acquainted with spiritual things, and brought under the power of the life of Christ. We foolishly imagine that such should only be told of the remainders of unbelief, or spiritual pride, or such like evils as are very remote from public infamy and scandal; but the Spirit of God is wiser than we; and knoweth our hearts, and the secret workings of them, better than we do ourselves; and it is better these sins should be laid open in the warnings of the word, and discovered to us, rather than in us, by the prevalency of a temptation.

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Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)