

## **MORTIFICATION: “THE DOCTRINE WHICH IS ACCORDING TO GODLINESS.” (1 Timothy 6:3; Romans 8:13)**

“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.” Romans 8:13.

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1 The term "doctrine" has a wider meaning in the Word of God than is usually thought of today. It includes very much more than the "five points" of Calvinism. Thus we read of "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Timothy 6:3), which is more than a collection of intellectual propositions intended for the instructing of our brains, namely it is the formal statement of spiritual facts and holy principles, for exciting enthusiasm, cheerfulness and vitality of the heart and the regulating of our lives.

"The doctrine which is according to godliness" design or end is to inculcate (to implant by repeated statements and admonitions) a right temper of mind and conduct and behavior of life towards God: it is pure and purifying. The objects which are revealed to faith are not bare abstractions which are to be accepted as true, nor even sublime and lofty concepts to be admired — they are to have a powerful effect upon our daily walk. There is no doctrine revealed in Scripture for a merely speculative knowledge, but all is to exert a powerful influence upon conduct. God's design in all that He has revealed to us is to the purifying of our affections and the transforming of our characters. The doctrine of grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11-12). By far the greater part of the doctrine (John 7:16: “Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me”) taught by Christ consisted not only of the explanation and interpretation of mysteries, but rather that which corrected men's lusts and reformed their lives. Everything in Scripture has in view the promotion of holiness.

If it be an absurdity to affirm that it matters not what a man believes so long as he does that which is right (Proverbs 16:25), equally erroneous is it to conclude that if my creed is sound, it matters little how I live. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8), for he shows himself to be devoid of natural affection. Thus it is possible to deny the Faith by conduct as well as by words. A neglect of performing our duty is as real a repudiation of the Truth as is an open renunciation of it, for the Gospel, equally with the Law, requires children to honor their parents. (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 19:19). Observe how that awful list of reprehensible characters mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:9-11, are said to be "contrary to sound doctrine" — opposed to its beneficial nature and spiritual tendency: that is that conduct which the standard of God prohibits.

Observe also how that the spirit of covetousness or love of money is designated an erring "from the faith" (1 Timothy 6:10): it is a species of heresy, a departure from the doctrine which is according to godliness — a dreadful example of which we have in the case of Judas Iscariot.

Mortification is one of the practical doctrines of the Bible, as we hope to show in this sermon. In the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ we teach the doctrines of the Bible. You should expect that and you're entitled to that.

Romans 8:13 supplies a comprehensive description of our subject: **“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.”** This is a most sober and searching verse, but one which has no place in modern so-called Christianity. As is said of the 10 northern tribes of Israel, following the inculcation of the doctrine of the golden calves, they are “joined unto idols” (Hosea 4:7). Friends, be very afraid of the second half of that verse: “Let him alone.”

Five things in Romans 8:13 claim our attention: First, the people addressed. Second, the awful warning here set before them. Third, the duty enjoined upon them. (“Enjoined” here means it is not a suggestion that you can take or leave at their discretion.) Fourth, the effectual Helper provided. Fifth, the promise made to them.

Preliminarily, we need to ask a number of pertinent questions.

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2 What is the relation between our text and the context? Why are both of its members in the hypothetical form — “if”? Does the “ye” in each half of the verse have reference to the same people, or are there two entirely different classes in view? If the latter is the case, then by what valid principle of Bible interpretation can we account for such? Why not change one of them to “any” or “they”? What is meant by “live after the flesh”? Is it possible for a real Christian to do so? If not, and it is unregenerate people who are mentioned, then why say they “shall die,” seeing that they are dead already spiritually? Are the terms “die” and “live” here used figuratively and relatively, or literally and absolutely? What is the meant or implied by “mortify” and why “the deeds of the body” rather than “the lusts of the flesh”? If the “ye” perform that task, then how “through the Spirit”? If He is the prime Worker, then why is the mortifying found or derived of them? If there is combined action, then how are the two factors to be arranged or fitted properly? In what manner will the promise “ye shall live” be made good, seeing they already are alive spiritually?

The whole context makes it quite evident what particular classes of people are here addressed. **Romans 8:1-17:**

**1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 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. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.**

First, this chapter begins its address to those who are in Christ Jesus, upon whom there is now no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Second, it is those who have been made free from the law of sin and death, and had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them (Romans 8:2-4). Third, it is those who give proof that they are the beneficiaries of Christ, by walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit (Romans 8:4). In what immediately follows, a description is given of two radically different classes: 1. Those who are after the flesh, or carnally minded; 2. Those whose legal standing is not in the flesh, but in the spirit, who are spiritually minded because indwelt by the Spirit of God (verses 5-11). Fourth, concerning the latter — “we” as opposed to the “they” of verse 8 — the apostle draws a plain and practical conclusion: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to

live after the flesh" (Romans 8:12) — Paul leaves us in no doubt as to the particular type of characters he was addressing when he says “brethren.”

Thomas Manton, an English Puritan preacher, who was Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, had a helpful sermon on this verse (Romans 8:12); and this is the essential message:

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3 Man would gladly be at his own disposal. The language of his heart is "our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (Psalm 12:4). He believes he is supreme and claims the right of dominion over his own actions. But his claim is invalid, He was made by Another and for Another, and therefore he is a "debtor." He is debtor to the One who gave him being.

Christians are debtors both as creatures and as new creatures, being entirely dependent upon God alike for their being and their well-being, for their existence and preservation. As our Maker, God is our Owner, and being our Owner He is therefore our Governor, and by consequence our Judge. He has an absolute ownership over us, an unchallengeable power over us, to command and dispose of us as He pleases. We have nothing but what we receive from Him. We are accountable to Him for our time and our talents. Every benefit we receive increases our obligation to Him. We have no right to please ourselves in anything. This debt cannot be dissolved: as long as we are dependent upon God for being and support, so long as we are bound to Him. Sin has in no wise cancelled our obligation, for though fallen man has lost his power to obey, the Lord has not lost His power to command.

By virtue of his spiritual being, the saint is still more a debtor to God: First, because of his **redemption** by Christ, for he is not his own, but bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). The state from which he was redeemed was one of woeful bondage, for he was a slave of Satan. Now when a captive was ransomed he became the absolute property of the purchaser under the Mosaic Code (Leviticus 25: 45-46). The end which Christ had in view proves the same thing: He has "redeemed us to God" (Revelation. 5:9). Second, because of his **regeneration**. The new nature then received inclines to God: we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Ephesians 2:10). Having brought us from death unto life, renewed us in His image, bestowed upon us the status and privileges of sonship, we owe ourselves, our strength and our service unto God as His beneficiaries. The new creature is diverted from its proper use if we live after the flesh. Third, because of our own **dedication** (Romans 12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”). A genuine conversion involves the renunciation of the world, the flesh and the devil, and the giving up of ourselves unto the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5). Since our obedience to God is a debt, there can be no merit in it (Luke 17:10); but if we don’t pay it, we incur the debt of punishment (Matthew 6:12,15). Since the flesh has no right to command, the gratification of it is the yielding to a tyrannical usurper (Romans 6:12, 14). When solicited by the flesh, the believer should reply, "I am the Lord's." Manton is frequently cited to and quoted by Bible commentators we find reliable.

For if ye live according to the flesh ye will die; but if by the Spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. Here are two sharply contrasted propositions, each one being expressed conditionally. Two eventualities are plainly set forth. Two suppositions are mentioned, and the inevitable outcome of each clearly stated. Both parts of the verse affirm that if a certain course of conduct be steadily followed (for it is far from being isolated actions which are referred to) a certain result would inevitably follow. This hypothetical form of presenting the Truth is quite a common one in the Scriptures. Servants of Christ are informed that "If any man's [literally "any one's,"] that is of the "ministers" of verse 5, the "laborers" of verse 9, work abide which he has built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's ["one's," "minister's"] work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss" (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). Other well-known examples are, "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ," and "For if I build again the things which I destroyed [renounced], I make myself a transgressor" (Galatians 1:10; Galatians 2:18). "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3, and cf. Hebrews 10:26).

Our text, then, is parallel with, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6:8).

Page | There are two things which the people of God are ever in need of: faithful warnings, and kindly encouragements. The faithful warnings are to curb their sinful propensities — the kindly encouragements are to animate their spiritual graces to the performing of duty, especially when they are cast down by the difficulties of the way or are mourning over their failures. Here too, a balance needs to be carefully preserved.

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Inexperienced believers have little realization of the difficulties and perils before them, and the hearts of older ones are so deceitful that each alike needs to be plainly and frequently corrected, and exhorted to pay attention to the danger-signals which God has set up along our way. It is both striking and solemn to note how often the Savior sounded the note of warning, not only to the wicked, but more especially to His disciples. By way of examples, He bade them, "Take heed what you hear" (Mark 4:24); "Beware of false prophets" (Matthew 7:15); "Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness" (Luke 11:35); "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32); "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." (Luke 21:34). To one He had healed, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14).

The word "flesh" is used in Scripture in a number of senses, but throughout Romans 8 it signifies that corrupt and depraved nature which is in us when we enter this world. That evil nature or principle is variously designated. It is termed "sin" (Romans 7:8), "warring against the law of my mind" (Romans 7:23). In James 4:5, "the spirit that dwells in us lusteth to envy," to indicate that it is not a tangible or material entity. But more commonly it is called "the flesh" (John 3:6; Romans 7:25; Galatians 5:17).

It is so termed because it is transmitted from parent to child as the body is, because it is propagated by natural generation, because it is strengthened and drawn forth by carnal objects, because of its base character and degeneracy. It was not in man when he left the hand of his Creator and was pronounced by Him "very good." (Genesis 1:31). Rather was it something that he acquired by the fall. The principle of sin as a foreign element, as a thing as extra, as an invading agent, entered into him, completely spoiling the whole of his natural being. Genesis 2:16-17: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The proper rendering is "in dying thou shalt die." As Matthew Poole renders this expression (and the other serious Bible commentators agree): "With a threefold death. 1. Spiritual, by the guilt and power of sin: at that instant thou shalt be dead in trespasses and sins, #Eph 2:1. 2. Temporal, or the death of the body, which shall then begin in thee, by decays, infirmities, terrors, dangers, and other harbingers of death. 3. Eternal, which shall immediately succeed the other."

The "flesh" is the open, implacable, habitual, irreconcilable enemy of holiness, yes, it is "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7) — an "enemy" may be reconciled, not so "enmity" itself. Then what an evil and abominable thing is the flesh: at variance with the Holy One, a rebel against His Law. It is therefore our enemy, yes; it is far and away the worst enemy the believer has. The Devil and the world without, do all their mischief to the souls of men by the flesh within them.

"The flesh is the womb where all sin is conceived and formed, the anvil upon which all is wrought, the false Judas that betrays us, the secret enemy within that is ready on all occasions to open the gates to the besiegers" (Thomas Jacomb, 1622-87).

There is a difference between being in the flesh and living after the flesh. Thus, "For when we were in the flesh" (Romans 7:5) has reference to Christians in their unregenerate condition, as "they that are in the flesh cannot

please God" speaks of the unsaved; whereas "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit" (Romans 8:8-9) is predicated of believers. "In the flesh" imports a person's standing and state before God; living after the flesh describes his course and conversation. The one inevitably follows and corresponds to the other: a person's character and conduct agree with his condition and case.

Page | 5 The flesh is fundamentally and completely evil: as Romans 7:18, declares, there is "no good thing" in it, is beyond converting it into something good, and incapable of any improvement. It may indeed put on a religious garb, as did the Pharisees, but beneath is nothing but rottenness. (Matthew 23:27). As the "flesh" continually opposes that which is good, so it ever inclines the soul to what is evil. To "walk after" or to "live after the flesh" (both terms have the same force) is for a person to conduct himself as do all the unregenerate, who are dominated and motivated by nothing but their fallen nature. To "live after the flesh" refers not to a single act, nor even to a habit or a series of acts in one direction; but rather to the whole man being governed and guided by this vile nature. That is the case with all who are out of Christ: their desires, thoughts, speech and deeds all proceed from this corrupt fountain. It is by the flesh that the whole of their souls are set in motion and their entire course steered. All is directed by some fleshly consideration. They act from self, or base principle; they act for self, or base end. The glory of God is nothing to them; the flesh is all in all.

The flesh is an energetic, active, ambitious principle, and therefore it is spoken of as a lusting thing. Thus we read of "the lusts of the flesh," yes, of "the desires of the flesh" (Ephesians 2:3) for its desires are vehement and dictatorial. A dictator is a person exercising absolute power, especially a ruler who has absolute, unrestricted control. But indwelling sin, taking occasion [being aggravated] by the commandment ["thou shalt not covet"], wrought in me all manner of lust (Romans 7:7-8).

Education and culture may result in a refined exterior; family training and other influences may lead to a claim of religion, as is the case with the great majority of the heathen; selfish considerations may even issue in voluntarily undergoing great strictness and deprivations, as the Buddhist to attain unto Nirvana, the Mohammedan to gain paradise, the Catholic to merit Heaven — but the love of God prompts none of them, nor is His glory their aim. Though the Christian be "not in the flesh" as to his status and state, yet the flesh as an evil principle (unchanged) is still in him, and it "lusts against the spirit" (Galatians 5:17) or new nature, and therefore are we exhorted, "Let not sin [that is the flesh] therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12).

It requires to be pointed out that there is a twofold walking or living after the flesh: the one more gross and manifest, the other more indiscernible. The first breaks forth into open and bodily lusts and acts, such as drunkenness or immorality: this is "the filthiness of the flesh." (2 Corinthians 7:1). The second is when the flesh exerts itself in internal heart lusts, which are more or less concealed from our fellows, which lie smoldering and festering within our soul, such as pride, unbelief, self-love, envy, covetousness; this is the filthiness "of the spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

In Galatians 5:18-26, the apostle gives a catalogue of the lustings of the flesh in both of these respects. It is generally assumed that walking or living "according to the flesh" is limited to the first form mentioned, and the second one is little considered or regarded. So long as men abstain from gross intemperance, open profanity, brutish sensuality, they think that all is well with them, whereas they may be quite free from all gross practices and still be guilty of living after the flesh. Such is the case with all in whose hearts there are inordinate affections after the world, a spirit of self-exaltation, covetousness, malice, hatred, uncharitableness, and many other reprehensible lusts.

Our text makes crystal clear to us the fundamental and vital importance of the duty here enjoined, for our performance or non-performance thereof is literally a matter of life and death. Mortification is not optional, but

imperative. It is absolutely necessary or required; unavoidable. The solemn alternatives are plainly stated: neglect ensures everlasting misery, compliance therewith is assured eternal bliss. The whole verse is manifestly addressed to saints, and they are faithfully warned, "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die" — that is, die eternally, for as in Romans 5:12, 21; 7:23; 8:6, "death" includes all the penal consequences of sin both here and hereafter; so in our text "die" manifestly signifies "shall suffer the second death," which is "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8). The express reason is here advanced why Christians should not live after the flesh: they are not debtors to it to do so (Romans 8:12): if they surrender to its dominion, the wages of sin will most certainly be paid them. "The flesh belongs to the world, and the man who is yielding to its promptings is in the world, living like the world, and must perish with the world" (James Stifler, in his exposition of the book of Romans, page 148).

It was by yielding to the lusts of the flesh that Adam brought death upon himself and all his posterity. And if I live after the flesh, that is, am governed and guided by my old nature, acting habitually according to its inclinations — for it is a persistent and continuous course of conduct which is here mentioned — then, no matter what be my profession, I shall perish in my sin. It is the gratifying and serving of the flesh, instead of the will of God, which eternally ruins souls.

"It may be asked whether one who has received the grace of God in truth, can live after the flesh. To live in a continued course of sin is contrary to the grace of God; but flesh may prevail and greatly influence the life and conversation for a while. How long this may be the case of a true believer under backsliding, through the power of corruptions and temptations, cannot be known; but certain it is that it shall not be always thus with him" (John Gill).

The whole of our verse pertains to professing Christians, and at the present moment. The Apostle did not simply say, "If ye have lived after the flesh," for that is the case with every unregenerate soul. But if ye now live after the flesh, "ye shall die" — in the full meaning of that word. It is a general statement of a universal truth.

Benjamin W. Newton, a preacher of Plymouth, England in the late 1800s explains Paul's use of these words: "An expression of this kind is addressed to us for two reasons. First, because in the professing church the apostle knew there were and would be false professors. So whenever collective bodies are addressed, he always uses words implying uncertainty and doubt, for tares will be among the wheat. And second, true believers themselves (though grace can preserve them) have now nevertheless always a tendency in them to the same paths. Therefore descriptions like this, which are true to the full of those who merely profess, may yet be rightly applied to all who are wandering into those paths."

See here the faithfulness of God in so plainly warning of the terrible doom awaiting all who live after the flesh. Instead of thinking harshly of God for His threatenings, we should be grateful for them. Yes, America and world, you should be grateful for the warnings of Westboro Baptist Church. We are only His ambassadors: ambassadors carry and faithfully deliver the message of their sovereign. (Brothers and sisters, I believe we are among those valiant ones that "cry without", those ambassadors that "weep bitterly" in Isaiah 33:7). See the justice of God. To be pleasing self is to continue in the apostasy of mankind, and therefore the original sentence (Genesis 2:17) is in force against them. It is contempt of God, and the heinousness of the sin is measured by the greatness of Him who is affronted (1 Samuel 2:25: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.") Moreover, they refuse the remedy, and therefore are doubly guilty.

See here the wisdom of God in appointing the greater punishment to curb the greatness of the temptation. The pleasures of sin are but for a season (Hebrews 11:25), but the paths of sin are for evermore (Job 8:13; Romans 6:23): if the latter—this death--were soundly believed and seriously considered, the former—paths of sin--would

not so easily prevail with us. Behold the holiness of God: an unmortified soul is unfit for His presence. Conformity to Christ fits for Heaven, and where that is lacking there can be no entrance. (Romans 8:29).

"For if ye live according to the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Romans 8:13). The whole of this verse pertains and belongs to believers, who are "debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh" (Romans 8:12); but, instead, debtors to Christ who redeemed them, and therefore to live to His glory; debtors to the Holy Spirit who regenerated and indwells them, and therefore to live in subjection to His absolute control.

What is signified by "mortify"? First, from its being here placed in proximity with "live after the flesh," its negative sense is more or less obvious. To "live after the flesh" is to be completely controlled by indwelling sin, to be thoroughly under the dominion of our inbred corruptions. Hence, mortification consists in a course of conduct which is just the reverse. It imports: Comply not with the demands of your old nature, but rather subdue them. Serve not, cherish not your lusts, but starve them: "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). The natural desires and appetites of the physical body require to be disciplined, so that they are our servants and not our masters; it is our responsibility to moderate, regulate and subordinate them to the higher parts of our being. But the cravings of the body of sin are to be promptly refused and sternly denied. The spiritual life is retarded just in proportion as we yield subservience to our evil passions. Retarded as in characterized by a slowness or limitation in intellectual understanding and awareness, emotional development, academic progress, etc.

The imperative necessity for this work of mortification arises from the continued presence of the evil nature in the Christian. Upon his believing in Christ unto salvation, he was at once delivered from the condemnation of the Divine law, and freed from the reigning power of sin; but "the flesh" was not eradicated from his being, nor were its vile propensities purged or even modified. That fount of filthiness still remains unchanged unto the end of his earthly career.

Not only so, but it is ever active in its hostility to God and holiness: "The flesh lusts against the Spirit [or new nature], and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). Thus there is a ceaseless conflict in the saint between indwelling sin and inherent grace. Consequently there is a perpetual need for him to mortify or put to death not only the actings of indwelling corruption but also the principle itself. He is called upon to engage in ceaseless warfare and not allow temptation to bring him into captivity to his lusts.

The Divine prohibition is "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness [enter into no truce, form no alliance, make no arrangement or accommodation with], but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). Say, "What have I to do any more with idols!" (Hosea 14:8).

No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified. Allowed evil draws the heart away from God, entangles the affections, agitates the soul, and provokes the Holy One to close His ears against our prayers: "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" (Ezekiel 14:3). Ephesians 4:30: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." 1 Thessalonians 5:19: "Quench not the Spirit."

God cannot in any way delight in an unmortified soul: for Him to do so would be denying Himself or acting contrary to His own nature. He has no pleasure in wickedness, and cannot look with the slightest approval on evil. (Habakkuk 1:13). Sin is mire, and the more miry we are — the less fit for His eyes (Psalm 40:2). Sin is leprosy (Isaiah 1:6), and the more it spreads — the less converse will the Lord have with us. Deliberately to

keep sin alive is to defend it against the will of God, and to challenge combat with the Most High. (1 Corinthians 10:22).

Unmortified sin is against the whole design of the Gospel — as though Christ's sacrifice was intended to indulge us in sin, rather than redeem us from it. The very end of Christ's dying was the death of sin.

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8 Though risen with Christ, their life hid with Him in God, and they certain to appear with Christ in glory, the saints are nevertheless exhorted to mortify their members which are upon the earth (Colossians 3:1-5). It may appear strange when we note what particular members the apostle specified. It was not vain thoughts, coldness of heart, unwary walking — but the visible and most repulsive members of the old man: "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry;" and in verses 8 and 9 he bids them again, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth" and lying.

Startling and solemn it is to find that believers require calling upon to mortify such gross and foul sins as those — yet it is no more than is necessary. The best Christians on earth have so much corruption within them, which habitually disposes them to these iniquities (as great and heinous as they are), and the Devil will so suit his temptations as will certainly draw their corruptions into open acts, unless they keep a tight hand and close watch over themselves in the constant exercise of mortification. None but the Holy One of God could truthfully state, "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30) which could be kindled by his fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16).

There is no crime, however enormous, no abomination, however vile, but what any of us are capable of committing — if we do not have the work of mortification exercised in us.

But why "mortify the deeds of the body"? We could have expected it to read "mortify the flesh." In the seventh chapter and the opening verses of the eighth the apostle had treated of indwelling sin as the fount of all evil actions; and here he insists on the mortifying of both the root and the branches of corruption, referring to the duty under the name of the fruits it bears.

The "deeds of the body" must not be restricted to mere outward works, but be understood as including also the springs from which they issue. The axe must be laid to the root of the tree. (Matthew 3:10) It appears that "the body" here has a twofold reference. First, to the evil nature or indwelling sin, which in Romans 6:6, and Romans 7:24, is likened unto a body, namely "the body of the sins of the flesh" (Colossians 2:11). It is a body of corruption which encompasses the soul: hence we read of "your members which are upon the earth" (Colossians 3:5). The "deeds of the body" are the works which corrupt nature produces, namely our sins. Thus the "body" is here used objectively of "the flesh."

Second, the "body" here includes the house in which the soul now dwells. It is specified to denote the degrading intense ill will which there is in sin, reducing its slaves to live as though they had no souls. It is mentioned to import the tendency of indwelling sin, namely to please and pamper the baser part of our being. The body is here referred to for the purpose of informing us that though the soul be the original abode of "the flesh" the physical frame is the main instrument of its actions.

Our corruptions are principally manifested in our external members: it is there that indwelling sin is chiefly found and felt. Sins are denominated "the deeds of the body" not only because they are what the lusts of the flesh tend to produce, but also because they are executed by the body (Romans 6:12). Our task then is not to transform and change "the flesh," but to slay it: to refuse its impulses, to deny its aspirations, to put to death its appetites.

March 5, 2017: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Romans 8:13.

But who is sufficient for such a task — a task which is not a work of nature, but wholly a spiritual one? It is far beyond the unaided powers of the believer. Means and ordinances cannot of themselves effectuate it. It is beyond the province and ability of the preacher — omnipotence must do this work.

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"If ye through the Spirit do mortify," that is "the Spirit of God...the Spirit of Christ" of Romans 8:9 — the Holy Spirit; for He is not only the Spirit of holiness in His nature, but in His operations too. He is the principal efficient cause of mortification. Let us marvel at and adore the Divine grace which has provided such a Helper for us. Let us recognize and realize that we are as truly indebted to and dependent upon the Spirit's operations as we are upon the Father's electing and the Son's redeeming us. Though grace be wrought in the hearts of the regenerate, yet it lies not in their power to act it. He who imparted the grace — must renew, excite, and direct it.

Believers may employ the aids of inward discipline and rigor, and practice outward moderation and abstinence, and while they may for a time check and suppress their evil habits — unless the Spirit puts forth His power in them, there will be no true mortification. And how does He operate in this particular work? In many different ways.

First, at the new birth He gives us a new nature. (Ezekiel 36:26; Ephesians 2:1). Then by nourishing and preserving that nature (Jude 1:1). In strengthening us with His might in the inner man (2 Corinthians 4:16). In granting fresh supplies of grace from day to day (Psalm 68:19). By working in us a loathing of sin, a mourning over it, a turning from it (2 Corinthians 7:10; Romans 7:13; Isaiah 61:2; Ezekiel 36:31; Jeremiah 31:18). By pressing upon us the claims of Christ, making us willing to take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34; Psalm 110:3). By bringing some precept or warning to our mind (John 14:26). By sealing a promise upon the heart (John 6:27). By moving us to pray (Romans 8:26).

Yet let it be carefully noted that our text does not say, "If the Spirit mortifies," or even "If the Spirit through ye mortify," but, instead, "If ye through the Spirit": the believer is not passive in this work, but active. It must not be supposed that the Spirit will help us without our concurrence, whether or not we maintain a close watch over our thoughts and works, and exercise nothing but a slight wish or sluggish prayer for the mortification of our sins. Believers are required to set themselves seriously to the task. If on the one hand we cannot discharge this duty without the Spirit's enablement — on the other hand He will not assist if we are too slothful to put forth earnest endeavors. Don't let the lazy Christian imagine he will get the victory over his lusts. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Colossians 3:5. That is the doctrine stated again and it is work, work, and more work. The origin of mortify is put to death, kill, and cause to die.

The Spirit's grace and power afford no license to idleness, but rather call upon us to the diligent use of means and looking to Him for His blessing upon the same. We are expressly exhorted, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1), and that makes it plain that the believer is not a nonentity in this work. The gracious operations of the Spirit, were never designed to be a substitute for the Christian's discharge of duty. Though His help be indispensable, yet it releases us not from our obligations.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21) emphasizes our accountability and shows that God requires much more than our waiting upon Him to stir us to action. Is no self-effort required to escape the snares of Satan, by refusing to walk in those paths which God has prohibited? Is no self-effort called for in separating ourselves from the companionship of the wicked? The Bible provides a plenitude of words of instruction in this work.

Mortification is a task to which every Christian must apply himself with prayerful diligence and resolute earnestness. The regenerate have a spiritual nature within that fits them for holy action, otherwise there would be no difference between them and the unregenerate. They are required to improve the death of Christ, to “make sin exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:13) to them by His sufferings. They are to use the grace received in bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, from the seed of incorruptible grace supernaturally implanted. (Romans 7:4).

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Nevertheless, it is a task which far transcends our feeble powers. It is only "through the Spirit" that any of us can acceptably or effectually (in any degree) "mortify the deeds of the body." He it is who presses upon us the claims of Christ: reminding us that inasmuch as He died for sin, we must spare no efforts in dying to sin — striving against it (Hebrews 12:4), confessing it (1 John 1:9), and forsaking it (Proverbs 28:13). He preserves us from giving way to despair, and encourages us to renew the conflict. (See e.g., Ephesians 6:10-18). He deepens our longings after holiness, and moves us to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God!" (Psalm 51:10).

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body." Mark the balance of truth which is here carefully preserved: while God's elect's responsibility is strictly enforced, the honor of the Spirit is as definitely maintained and Divine grace is magnified. Believers are the agents in this work, yet they perform it by the strength of Another. The duty is theirs — but the success and the glory are His. The Spirit works within and upon us as moral agents. The same work is, in one point of view, God's; and in another ours. He illuminates the understanding, and makes us more sensible of indwelling sin. He makes the conscience more sensitive. He deepens our yearnings after purity. He works in us both to will and to do of God's good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

Our business is to take heed to those things which he has caused us to firmly believe (1 Timothy 4:16), to respond to His holy impulses (Psalm 51:11), to implore His aid (Hebrews 4:16), to count upon His grace (Proverbs 3:5).

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Here is the encouraging promise set before the sorely tried contestant. God will be no man's debtor: yes, He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). If then, by grace, we concur with the Spirit, denying the flesh, striving after holiness, we shall be richly recompensed.

The promise to this duty is opposed to the death threatened in the first clause: as "die" there includes all the penal consequences of sin — so "shall live" comprehends all the spiritual blessings of grace. If by the Spirit's enablement and our diligent use of the Divinely appointed means we sincerely and constantly oppose and refuse the solicitations of indwelling sin, then — but only then — we shall live a life of grace and comfort here, and a life of eternal glory and bliss hereafter.

“Eternal life” (1 John 2:25) is the believer's present possession (John 3:36; John 10:28) and also his future goal (Mark 10:30; Galatians 6:8; Titus 1:2). He now has a title and right to it; he has it by faith, and in hope; he has the seed of it in his new nature. But he has it not yet in full possession and fruition.

"The promises of the Gospel are not made to the work, but to the worker; and to the worker not for his work, but according to his work, for the sake of Christ's work. The promise of life, then, is not made to the work of mortification, but to him that mortifies his flesh; and that not for his mortification, but because he is in Christ, of which this mortification is the evidence. That those who mortify the flesh shall live, is quite consistent with the truth that eternal life is the free gift of God; and in the giving of it, there is no respect to the merit of the receiver. This describes the character of all who receive eternal life; and it is of great importance. It takes away all ground of hope from those who profess to know God, and in works deny Him" (Robert Haldane, in his Exposition of the book of Romans, at Chapter 8, verse 13). I love you. Amen.