

Be Killing Sin or it will Be Killing You.

Romans 8:12-13

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Good morning everyone. It is my joy to labor in the word that you might be encouraged today. I do hope and pray that the outcome of this time would be that each of us would be invigorated in our assault against sin. That we would be enraged against the deeds of the flesh and that by the power of the spirit we all would experience that wonderful joy that is achieved in the victory over our flesh by the power of the spirit. Let's all turn to Romans 8:12. We are not going to read it yet, but let's go there so that we are ready.

Be Killing Sin, Or it Will be Killing You

I think that it is right to provide somewhat of a disclaimer at the onset of this sermon that the content of this sermon is not mine, but rather much of the illumination of what scripture has already revealed has come to me from the writings of John Owen. John Owen was born in 1616 and was renowned throughout his life for his many writings, his involvement with affairs of state in England, serving as a pastor, and for years working as an official of Oxford University. But his work that primarily aided this sermon was his writing "On the Mortification of Sin in Believers". This writing is readily available for free on [librivox](#) for those with smartphones who would be interested in an audio book version, and available through many other online sources for those who wish to read it. I would strongly suggest that everyone consider this writing through your choice medium. It is from this work of John Owen that I bring you the title of my message, and many points are derived from his exposition of the same text that we are going to be examining.

So, with that being said and all of you now aware of my open and blatant semi-plagiarism, let us continue on.

One's own sin nature is by far the most dangerous adversary that any Christian will encounter. From the early church until now, from St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas in the early church to RC Sproul and John MacArthur of today, there has been a saying in the church, "The greatest enemies of the believer are the flesh, the world and the devil". And in the evaluation of these three great adversaries of each believer, I think that it isn't a stretch to state that one's own flesh is by far the most foreboding, the most damaging, and the most challenging to overcome.

The devil, although much stronger than any human, is defeated in the justification we have in Christ. All of his fiery darts of accusation are quenched in the fountain of Christ's blood and scripture promises us in James 4:7, that if we resist him, he will flee. 1 Peter 5:9 says almost the exact same thing, resist the devil, and he will flee! We also see in the book of Job that he has no power over anyone save that which is given him by God almighty. The devil should not be ignored or thought of as a non-threat, but as I review these three great threats, and great threats they all are, I would evaluate the devil as being the lesser of these three dangers.

The world I believe merits a second position because of 2 primary characteristics. But let's define "the world" first. The creation itself is not the intrinsic danger here, but rather the sin that exists in the creation. When we say that the enemy of our souls is "the world" we mean the influence of sin in the creation is the enemy of our souls. Romans 8:20 tells us that "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Sin entered into the world through one man, Adam. And it is the sins of Adam and everyone else who lived in history past, or lives now, that makes the world an influence of death. Our world is permeated with sin and all mankind is infected in the same way. So the two primary characteristics of the world that win it the runner up position are its difficulty to escape and its pervasiveness. Although, as believers, we are not of this world, we are in it, and until death do us part, we are hard pressed to escape it completely. One may isolate themselves from the negative effects of the world, but at the detriment to the commands of our Lord who charged us to go and make disciples of every nation. The scripture makes no promises that we can resist the world and it will flee from us like the promises we have regarding resisting the devil, but we are promised that we can escape the pattern of the world by being transformed by the renewing of our minds as Paul tells us in Romans 12:2. The world, what could be called "everyone else's flesh", is a force we cannot completely escape, and it has a pervasive, indirect influence on us that is so close to the foundation of what we are and how we think that we often times don't notice it. When I say that, I mean that the sins of our cultures, the sins of our parents when they raise us, the sins of our close friends so profoundly influence our understandings and presuppositions, that we don't identify them as the assumptions they are. We see them as common truths. When asked why do you do this or that, none of us are a stranger to the old adage, "Because it's the way we have always done it". We are much like Tevye from "Fiddler on the Roof." Tradition! Although what we are talking about isn't tradition, in many aspect it acts the same way. And if I could quote Tevye, "You may ask, how did these traditions get started? I will tell you... I don't know". And often times that is exactly what is going on in our lives. We can't see the forest for the trees because of how foundational the influence of the world is upon us, and we gloss over assumptions we make due to the

influence of the world, instead of the influence of the word upon us. The influence of the world is difficult to escape, and subtle in its deceptions. These two primary characteristics are what I would say makes the world a 2nd tier threat.

That brings us to our last, and most insidious adversary, our flesh. Unlike the others, we are promised no respite from the active onslaught of our flesh. There is no escaping its poisonous words in our ears as it were. We cannot extricate ourselves from the flesh's grasp while we are yet living. When the devil will flee, and the world we may hold at an arm's length as we preach the good news, the flesh is a cancer, a festering wound that is not external to us, but rather it is intimately a part of our very core. I cannot think of a more terrifying adversary. Your and mine demise is being plotted and executed by one that we cannot escape, and whose life force originates from the body we share with it. This means that we cannot have complete and utter victory over it in this life. Deceitfully charming us all the day long to trample on the very blood of him who loved us and saved us when we were yet so undeserving. Every inappropriate thought of lust, were the flesh able to accomplish its full desire would be gross adultery. Every angry flash would be murder, every envy, theft, every doubt, rank atheism. The most ruthless and hateful enemy of our souls is us. We are our own worst enemy. No escape, and no ability to completely destroy this adversary, makes this threat our tier 1, most wanted, top of the hit list enemy.

But we should not despair, for the Lord did not leave us with such a great enemy without aid. In fact, when our greatest weakness surfaces, so does our greatest aid arrive. But unlike when reinforcements arrive on a battlefield that can completely alleviate the spent and weary soldier, the Lord has ordained that our help would not be completely external to us either. It is amazing that as God ordained that our greatest enemy would be us, he also ordained that our greatest weapon would also come from the indwelling Spirit within.

This is the primary proposition to my sermon, and what I want to try to convince you of. I believe that God reveals in his Word, that the help against our greatest adversary, the flesh, is by the power of a Holy Spirit empowered will through the process of mortification. Let me repeat that a different way, I believe that God reveals in his Word, that the prescription to treat the symptom of the old man, namely sin, is to bring the force of our will to bear for the destruction of the sin nature as only the unction and vigor of the Holy Spirit can empower us to do.

Let's read the text that is the basis of this proposition. Romans 8:12-13, I trust by now you are all there, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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". Put to death the deeds of the body. Thanatōō. Nothing particularly different from the translation in the greek. To put to death is a great translation. To cause to be dead, to make extinct, to destroy. So that makes me ask a question. If one of the means to have life that God has ordained, is to kill, to cause to be dead, to mortify the deeds of my flesh, does that mean that if I do this correctly, it would be a one time thing? This verse alone could sound like that, but we know from just a few verses earlier, he talked about how, even though we are dead to sin, sin still works in our bodies. If Paul, who was so exalted in grace above us in revelation and in discipline, was confessing the reality of this conflict of natures in himself, does he then turn around and say, oh, by the way, if you want to see life, you must utterly destroy the deeds of the flesh, as in a one time, off with it's head type of finality? No, that would not coincide with chapter 7. So, he isn't saying that if we do this correctly, it will be a one time, off with it's head, and then we can go on with the rest of our lives without the flesh bothering us. Rather Paul is giving us a word picture as it were. At the same moment he is telling us to fight against the flesh, he is revealing something about how we are to fight against it. Put it to death, mortify, cause it to go extinct.

If you were to set out to single handedly kill every single rattlesnake, do you think you would grab a knife and a backpack of food and just set out to kill them all on foot. No, you would plan, you would create a strategy, you would study this species until you understood it well, it's reproductive habits, it's eating habits, you would have to systematically eliminate all the streams of it's sustenance until there was no possibility of it existing. I do not believe that Paul is giving us a ending goal, but rather a method goal. Namely, we need to go after our flesh and the deeds thereof with the determination of complete obliteration. No mercy, no timeouts. Just good, old fashion, unrelenting assault. We are not allowed to "make peace" with our flesh. We are not allowed to make a truce, no room for "You leave me alone, I'll leave you alone." There is not a moment where we feel pity for the old man. We are not to soften our blows. We are to put it to death, and with each strike we should aim that each one would be a deathblow.

There are quite a few other things that we could, with the appropriate amount of time, delve into in the exposition of this text, but I want to zone into one specifically. How do we put to death the deeds of the flesh? If we are called to an all out war on our flesh, the mandate to cause it go to extinct, how in the world do we do that when the one we are talking about killing here is us? Let's start by listing some things that it is not.

It is not the destruction of the physical body.

If this point seems silly to you, then good. Because the injury of the physical man is no more an act of mortification than a good deed done by a lost man is saving. There is a very real reason to bring this point up, however. For hundreds upon hundreds of years religious institutions advocated the acts of self maceration as means towards the end desired, namely the destruction of the deeds of the flesh. This error spawns from faulty beliefs that all things physical are evil, and all things spirit are good. Men caught up in these beliefs and others like it would twist scripture and establish monastical traditions that called those who desired a "holy" life to renounce the hope for a wife, for children, and take on strict fastings, coarse clothing and eventually giving way to punishing penances for sins, and so many traditions of self inflicted wounds that would cause any one of us to cringe.

This very behavior is nowhere commanded in scripture. They fall under the very reproach that Christ gave when he rebuked the pharisees for the way they "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the people's shoulders".

No one action, in itself, has any power to accomplish anything spiritually, except when God has prescribed that action for the purpose of accomplishing something. In other words, if God didn't tell us, fasting is to cure cancer, then it likely isn't the purpose of fasting. Likewise, if God doesn't prescribe a penance to be paid for sin toward the ends of mortification, then it is ludicrous to believe that such a penance would somehow facilitate the mortification of that sin. These ways of punishing the physical man that people used in the past as "means of mortification" were never appointed for that purpose and we must be careful not to fall into the deceit that the natural, old man, is the same thing as the physical body.

It is not merely the hiding of the outward effects of sin or the completion of certain devotions.

Mortification is not accomplished by checking off your list of good things to do each day and avoiding the list of bad things. If I could paraphrase John Owen in this, "Praying, Fasting, Watching, meditation, and the like all have their place in the work of mortification, but they are all streams for mortification, not the fountain itself. If your focus is to fast so much, and pray so much, and keep your schedule and times, your mortification will not be accomplished. The work completed, in and of itself does not cause sin to be defeated." This rings of what Christ so harshly criticised the pharisees in Matthew 24:23 "For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the

weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” They, who were so focused on the keeping of the outwards of the law but never coming to the point of the law, share a common thread in the same way that those who believe mere acts can mortify sin. Both, by themselves, are in vain. Such merely legal duties, without the least mention of Christ and his Spirit will by no means cause true mortification.

It is not a process that can be completed in this life.

There were those today and throughout history who would boast of living lives without sin, or would attest to the ability to go days, if not weeks in a row without committing a single sin. Scripture refutes these people.

Phil 3:12, Paul professes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."

If Paul would not dare to say he has attained, and if in Romans 7 he expressed the very fight of the flesh, I would feel very shy to express such a kind of success as it were. The God man, Jesus, proclaimed that he perfectly did the will of his father and we are counted as being obedient through his sacrifice, and not by our works, lest any man should boast. So the idea that anyone less than the Son of God could so conquer sin as to leave it without any strength, is not found anywhere biblically. Anyone who would so boast of a sinless disposition should undoubtedly examine themselves closely to be sure they are in the faith and should be looked on with suspicion by all true believers. To drive my point home, anyone who can look you in the face and say that they love God with all their heart, and all their soul, and all their might, effectively saying they love God perfectly, that person is deceived. There is no perfection in this life, and no one can, for even one moment, so escape the nature of sin that they could perfectly love God. In other words, every moment we fall short of this one command, nevermind all the others. We are, very much so, indebted to a marvelous grace that is greater than our sin. So this process of mortification cannot be perfectly accomplished in this life.

So we have three things that mortification is not. It is not the destruction of the body, it is not merely the effects of outward works, and it is not something that can be ever perfectly accomplished in this life. So what is mortification and how is it done? Let's zone in on three things that mortification is. I am certain one could find more but these are the three that I see scripture highlighting in this text:

It is the work of the Holy Spirit

It is the work of the believer

It is a daily work.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Let's go back to our text to start this. "but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live". So we see here that this mortification is done, by the Spirit. It is, by the Spirit alone that one can correctly wage war against the lust of the old man and without the power of the spirit there can be no mortification of sin on any level.

For those who are in Christ, we are given the Spirit to the accomplishing of this work and the spirit is working in you to cause you to mortify sin whether you like it or not. It really is a wonderful thing, because we are taught in Romans 3 that without God's intervention on our behalf, we would not be about anything that glorifies God besides opening ourselves up to his glory being displayed in our rightly deserved judgement. But because of his gracious intervention, we have this force in us that is causing us to do many things that we would not do on our own. John MacArthur outlines some of these ways that the Spirit is transforming us in the following quote, "He produces in us a desire for repentance, a hatred of sin. He produces in us a desire to seek salvation and forgiveness. He produces in us a belief in the gospel, a love for the Lord Jesus Christ, a desire to become a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging Him as Lord. He produces in us a delight in the Holy Scripture, a longing for obedience. He produces in us joy in trials and tribulations, love of other believers, desire for fellowship, understanding of the Bible, illumination of Scripture, inclination to prayer, holy affections, a desire for praise, a heart of thanksgiving, worship as a way of life, and increasing Christlikeness". And as Mr. MacArthur would say, "he, the Spirit, is doing that in you whether you like it or not".

The other side to that coin is that those who are not in Christ have no means at all to attack or truly conquer the old man. Just as Paul states in Rom 14, that "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin", and the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 11, "For without faith it is impossible to please him", likewise without the aid of the spirit, there is no means to mortify sin. It is done by the Spirit and by the Spirit only. A man working naturally cannot defeat the natural man. This is the work of the Spirit of God. Any mortification or attempts at mortification of the flesh by other means will not inherit eternal life. For the lost person, being kind to your elderly neighbor is an exercise in futility. Sacrificing yourself to save someone in the road from being hit by a car, for the lost person is an exercise in futility. It profits him nothing. Without the Spirit of God quickening our hearts, reading the words of scripture from a pulpit is an exercise in futility because there is no efficacy for you and I unless the the Spirit grants it to us and without the Spirit, Rom 8:13 cannot be accomplished. "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live", means that without the spirit you will not put to death the deeds of the body, and you will die in your sin!

So we establish that this work of mortification is the work of the Spirit. Well then it sounds like this is all the Spirit's work, so let us go about our days and allow the spirit to accomplish his work. Why would we struggle so if there is nothing we can do, right? Wrong! Point 2 is that mortification is the work of the believer. Let's read verse 13 again, "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live". So who is doing this? You are doing it. But you just said it was the work of the Spirit and the Spirit alone can do this. That's right. Well then I am not doing it? No, you are definitely doing it. So it's my work? That's right, but only by the spirit. If that causes confusion, then this is a great place to bring up a couple different terms that Christians have used to help with the understanding of this type of passage. Monergism and Synergism.

Monergism is defined as: One worker, or one actor

Synergism is defined as: Acting together, or working together.

So an example of monergism would be the work of regeneration. That sovereign action that God himself does that changes the heart of stone to the heart of flesh. It is solely the work of God. No one helps him, or can aid him in this process. It is a monergistic work.

The work of evangelism is a synergistic work. God, by the power of the Holy Spirit uses the words of a preacher to be the means of his monergistic work of regeneration. The work of evangelism is done by God and a man by the biblical mandate of preaching. Evangelism is a synergistic work.

The mortification of the flesh in our passage calls each of us specifically as the actors. We get to come back to that word in our passage, *Thanatōō* meaning to mortify. The Greek is written in a way that specifies the action is being done actively by the subject. The subject is you. Paul says if you, mortify the deeds of the flesh you will have life. You do that. But then he pulls the spirit into this whole thing and says by the spirit. Here we see this synergism, this hand in hand work. People who deny our active role in the process of mortification are denying this passage and they are giving into what Christians have called *qui-et-ism*. They say things like "if God wants to deliver me from this sin, He will do so in His own good time.", or "Let go and let God." But this is not the expression that the Bible portrays of our role in mortification. Just for additional support I'd like to review two other passages where we see this concept of our role in the process of sanctification.

1 Cor 9:24-27, "[24] Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. [25] Every athlete exercises self-



control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] So “I” do not run aimlessly; “I” do not box as one beating the air. [27] But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” Who is running this race? You are. The apostle says “I” discipline my body. He is doing that.

Even better than this passage I love 1 Cor 15:9. “[9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. [11] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

You feel that synergism. That co-labor. Paul says I worked harder than anyone else! I did that, but even though I did it, really, it was that blessed spirit of God that gave me grace, for without it I would not have worked for him, but rather I would have continued to work against him.

So we must run the race and we must fight the good fight against our mortal enemy, all the while trembling with the realization that it is the Spirit of the almighty God that works in us both to will and to do for his good pleasure. And as we engage our redeemed wills to mortify the deeds of the body, we are truly seeing the Holy Spirit work in us to form Christ in us. As Phil. 2:12-13 says, “[12] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” To quote John Piper on this passage, “Tremble! God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, your Father, your Redeemer, your Sustainer is in you willing and working. Tremble! Your acting is his acting.” Whenever we move in the Christ exalting direction of destroying the root of sin, we are not seeing our action, but his action. Yet it is our action. It is a synergistic act of the Holy Spirit and our redeemed wills.

These first two points are the focal point of what I want to convince you of. Don't sit there waiting for a supernatural lightning bolt to hit you cure you of lust, or partiality or gossip or lying. You, work out the details of how you are going to cause that sin to become extinct. You engage your will in the destruction of your adversary. Search out the scripture and pursue those spiritual gifts that are contrary to your sin and practice them like a runner in a race. Gal 5: 17 says “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.” With each step you take to towards those fruits of the spirit which are contrary to your natural man, you landing blows upon him and you are showing the evidence of that wonderful indwelling

Spirit who gives the strength and inclination towards the mortification of your sin nature in the first place. Don't wait one more minute. And this brings us to our final point.

The mortification of sin is a daily work. We have covered how this work of mortification is the work of the Spirit and synergistically also the work of the believer. But how does this play out in our lives? Why does this sin have to be dealt with daily? I would like to offer a fairly lengthy quote from John Owen, "Sin does not only still abide in us, but is still acting, still labouring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion. Sin does not only abide in us, but "the law of the members is still rebelling against the law of the mind," Rom. 7: 23; and "the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy," James 4:5. [Sin] is always in continual work; "the flesh lusts against the Spirit," Gal. 5:17; lust is still tempting and conceiving sin, James 1:14; in every moral action [sin] is always either inclining to evil, or hindering from that which is good, or disframing the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil. "The evil which I would not, that I do," says the apostle in Rom. 7:19. Why is that? Why, "Because in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing." And it hinders from good: "The good that I would do, that I do not," verse 19; -- "Upon the same account, either I do it not, or not as I should; all my holy things being defiled by this sin." "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, so that you cannot do the things that you would," Gal. 5:17. And it unframes our spirit, and thence is called "The sin that so easily besets us," Heb. 12:1; on which account are those grievous complaints that the apostle makes of it. So that sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he had ever any thing to do with God or for God, that indwelling sin had not a hand in the corrupting of what he did? And this trade will it drive more or less all our days. If, then, sin will be always acting, if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures. He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance, will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish, in proceeding to the ruin thereof, can we expect a comfortable event? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed upon; and it will be so while we live in this world." [end quote]

There is not one day where we do not conquer sin, or allow sin to conquer us. I think that last statement by John Owen sums up the reality of why sin must be dealt with daily, hourly, moment by moment. We should not be foolish in this. We should not be deceived in this. Each moment we provide sanctuary for sin in our hearts, is a moment

that we allow it to regain strength and position for accomplishing its purpose of our own demise.

So, Rom 8:13 calls us to the assault on our sin nature, by the spirit.

I have two different pleas to give you today.

To those who are unsaved: you have no hope to conquer sin without the spirit lending you aid. All your "good deeds" will be seen as filthy rags before a holy God. You are not in contending with the flesh, but rather you are a slave to him. There is no hope for you outside of Christ. So run! Run to him. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Do not wait another day for today is the day of salvation. Your adversaries are great. They will surely overtake you and without aid you will surely perish. So repent, turn away from the hope of saving yourself and trust in Christ alone!

For those who are saved:

Let's pray together that God would embolden each of us to take this mandate of the mortification of the flesh much more seriously than we previously have, and that we would live in the light of the truth seen in title of this sermon, that you must "Be Killing Sin, Or it Will Be Killing You", Let's pray

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.