

Why the Flesh Must Be Mortified

PAUL, in speaking to believers, thus challenges the Colossians: 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth' (Col. 3:5, KJV). Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? You must always be at it while you live; do not take a day off from this work; always be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Your position in Christ, and the new life that you have in him, does not excuse you from this work. Our Saviour tells us how his Father deals with every branch in him that beareth fruit; every true and living branch, 'he prunes [it], that it may bear more fruit' (John 15:2). He prunes it, and not just for a day or two, but as long as it is a branch in this world. Paul describes his practice: 'I discipline my body and keep it under control' (1 Cor. 9:27). This was his daily business. If this was the work and business of Paul, who was so exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, and consolations above the ordinary measure of believers, how can we be exempt from this work and duty while we are in the world?

Let us consider six reasons for our need to be at this important work.

THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

1. *Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world; therefore, there is always a need for it to be mortified.*

Some have wrongly and foolishly believed that we are able in this life to keep the commands of God perfectly and are wholly and perfectly dead to sin. Through ignorance of the true life in Christ and his power in believers, they have invented a new righteousness that is not in the gospel. They are vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. Indwelling sin continues to live in believers in some measure and degree while we are in this world. We should not speak as though we had already attained, or were already perfect (Phil. 3:12). Our 'inner nature is being renewed day by day' while we live (2 Cor. 4:16); and according to the renovations of the new are the breaches and decays of the old. While we are here we 'know in part' (1 Cor. 13:12). There is a remaining darkness to be gradually removed by our growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18); and 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would' (Gal. 5:17, KJV). We are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light (1 John 1:8). We have a 'body of death' (Rom. 7:24); from which we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies (Phil. 3:21). It is our duty to mortify, to be killing the sin while it is in us. We must be at this work. He that is appointed to kill an enemy, has only done half his work if he quits before the enemy is dead (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 12:1; 2 Cor. 7:1).

2. *Sin is still acting and labouring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh.*

When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone; but sin is always active when it seems to be the most quiet, and

its waters are often deep when they are calm. We should therefore fight against it and be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even when there is the least suspicion. 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit' (Gal. 5:17, KJV); lust is still tempting to and conceiving sin (James 1:14). It is called 'sin which clings so closely' (Heb. 12:1). Sin is always acting, always conceiving, and always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he has ever had anything to do with God or for God which indwelling sin has not tried to corrupt? This battle will last more or less all our days. If sin is always acting, we are in trouble if we are not always mortifying. He that stands still and allows his enemies to exert double blows upon him without resistance will undoubtedly be conquered in the end. If sin is subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we are slothful, negligent, and foolish in this battle, can we expect a favourable outcome? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed upon. It will always be so while we live in this world. Sin will not spare for one day. There is no safety but in a constant warfare for those who desire deliverance from sin's perplexing rebellion.

3. *Sin, if not continually mortified, will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, and soul-destroying sins* (Gal. 5:19, 20).

You know what sin did in David, and in others. Every time sin rises to tempt or entice, it always seeks to express itself in the extreme. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression; and every unbelieving thought would be atheism. It is like the grave that is never satisfied.

THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

In this we see the deceitfulness of sin. It gradually prevails to harden man's heart to his ruin (Heb. 3:13). Sin's expression is modest in the beginning but, once it has gained a foothold, it continues to take further ground and presses on to greater heights. This advance of sin keeps the soul from seeing that it is drifting from God. The soul becomes indifferent to the seed of sin as it continues to grow. This growth has no boundaries but utter denial of God and opposition to him. Sin precedes higher by degrees; it hardens the heart as it advances. This enables the deceitfulness of sin to drive the soul deeper and deeper into sin. Nothing can prevent this but mortification. Mortification withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour. The best saints in the world are in danger of a fall if found negligent in this important duty!

4. *The Holy Spirit and our new nature are given to us to oppose sin and lust* (Gal. 5:17; 2 Pet. 1:4). It is our participation in the divine nature that gives us an escape from the pollutions that are in the world through lust. We need to employ the Holy Spirit and our new nature in this battle for our souls. If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces and gifts are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and get benefit from. If we do not seek daily to mortify sin, we sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has given us the weapons of our warfare.

5. *Neglect of this duty makes the inner man decay instead of renewing him.* Paul affirms (2 Cor. 4:16) that the inward man is renewed day by day, while the outward man perishes. Those who neglect mortification allow the inner

man to perish. Grace in the heart must have exercise. If it is allowed to lie still, it withers and decays (Rev. 3:2), and sin seeks to harden our hearts (Heb. 3:13). The omission of mortification withers grace while lust flourishes. The frame of the heart grows worse and worse. When sin gains a considerable victory, it breaks the bones of the soul (Psa. 31:10; 51:8). It makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die (Psa. 38:3-5), so that he cannot look up (Psa. 40:12).

When poor creatures will take blow after blow, wound after wound, foil after foil, and never rise up to a vigorous opposition, can they expect any thing but to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and that their souls should bleed to death (2 John 8)? It is a sad thing to consider the fearful outcome of this neglect, which threatens us each day. Do we not see broken hearted Christians, who were humble, tender, fearful to offend, and zealous for God in all his ways, turn earthly, carnal, cold, and wrathful through a neglect of this duty? They learn to comply with the men of the world and the things of the world to the scandal of their faith.

Today, true mortification is all but lost between the rigid, stubborn frame of spirit which is earthly, legal, harsh, critical, consistent with wrath, envy, malice and pride, on the one hand, and pretences of liberty, grace, and I know not what, on the other.

6. *Our spiritual growth is our daily duty.* It is our duty to be 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor. 7:1, KJV), to be 'growing in grace' every day (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18), so that our inner nature should be renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). This cannot be accomplished without the daily

THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

mortifying of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and every degree of spiritual growth. We will not be making progress in holiness without walking over the bellies of our lusts. He who does not kill sin along the way is making no progress in his journey.

The main point thus far: Even while we claim the meritorious mortification of our sin through the work of the cross of Christ, and though the implantation of our new life in Christ is in opposition to and destructive of the expression of sin, sin remains, acts, and works in the best of believers while we are yet in this world. It must be our constant daily duty to mortify it.

Before proceeding, I cannot but note that even though there is in this generation a growing number of professors, a great noise of religion, religious duties in every corner, and preaching in abundance, there is little evidence of the fruit of true mortification. Perhaps we might find that, judging by the principle of mortification, the number of true believers is not as multiplied as it appears from those who have made a mere profession. Some speak and profess a spirituality that far exceeds the former days, but their lives give evidence of a miserable unmortified heart. If vain spending of time, idleness, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, selfishness (1 Cor. 1), are the mark of Christians, we have them among us in abundance. May the good Lord send us a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers, or we will be in a sad condition!

There are two evils which certainly accompany every unmortified professor, the first, in himself, and the second, with respect to others.

First, in himself. The basic characteristic of an unmortified course is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. He who is able to swallow and digest daily sins in his life without conviction in the heart is at the very brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Let a man pretend what he will, little concern over sin is a serious offence to the grace and mercy of God!

There is no greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world than to deal in such a trade. To claim the blood of Christ, which is given to cleanse us (1 John 1:7; Titus 2:14); the exaltation of Christ, which is to give us repentance (Acts 5:31); the doctrine of grace, which teaches us to deny all ungodliness (Titus 2:11, 12); and then to allow sin, is a rebellion that in the outcome will break the bones. From this door have gone out from us most of the professors that have apostatized in the days in which we live. For a while most of them were under conviction, and they 'escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Pet. 2:20). But after having become acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, they became weary of their spiritual duties. They had no true desire for these, and they allowed evil instead to lay hold of them, and speedily tumble them into perdition.

Second, to others. Unmortified professors have an evil influence on others in two ways:

1. Others are hardened in their own sin by persuading themselves that they are in just as good a condition as the unmortified professor. They see their zeal for religion, but it is not accompanied with righteousness. They view their

THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

worldly and selfish lives. They see them talk spiritually but live vainly. They hear them mention communion with God, and yet they are in every way conformed to the world. They see them boast of forgiveness of sins, and yet never forgive others. Thus, as they see the stain of sin in the unmortified professor, they harden their own hearts in their unregeneracy.

2. It deceives them to think that if they can just be as good as the unmortified professor it shall be well with them. In reality they might even go farther in 'holiness' than the unmortified professor, and yet still fall short of eternal life.