

Romans Session 102

Life in the Spirit 6

The Holy Spirit Empowers Us For Victory Over The Flesh 1

Romans 8:12-13 (NASB)

¹² *So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—*

¹³ *for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

In his often-republished book *The Reformed Pastor*, the seventeenth century Puritan Richard Baxter wrote,

Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonor Him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet condemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach His laws, and willfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? If it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatening's be true, why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, and yet will you do them? "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, or be frunk, or covetous, art thou such thyself? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonor thou God. What shall the same tongue speak evil that speakest against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbit your neighbor, that cry down thee and the like things in others? Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin, and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, an become its slaves yourselves: For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. O brethren! It is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it. Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. ([Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth, 1974]. Pp. 67-68)

Paul has just made clear in verses 5-11, that every genuine Christian is indwelt by God's own Spirit and that his new spiritual life therefore will not be characterized by worldly, fleshly concerns and activities by the things of God.

The apostle's emphasis then turns, in verses 12-13, to the believer's responsibility to eliminate sin in his life through the indwelling Spirit.

At the beginning of the reading today we see the words **So then**, Paul reminds his readers of the magnificent privileges of victory over sin that Christians have through the resident Holy Spirit.

In the previous eleven verses of chapter 8, he has pointed out, among other things, that believers are no longer under God's condemnation, that they are set free from the law of sin and death, that they are no longer under the domination of sin, that they walk by the Spirit, that they have minds that are set on the Spirit, and that they have life and peace through the Spirit.

All biblical exhortations to believers are based on the blessings and promises they already have from the Lord. Without the provisions we have from Him, we would be unable to fulfill the commands we receive from Him.

The Children of Israel, for instance, were not commanded to take possession of the Promised Land until it was promised to them by God and they were prepared by Him to conquer it.

In this letter to Rome, Paul's primary exhortations begin with chapter 12, after he has given countless reminders to his readers of their great spiritual privileges.

In Ephesians he first gives three chapters that are largely a listing of spiritual benefits. Just before his beautiful doxology at the end of chapter 3.

Ephesians 3:16-19 (NASB)

¹⁶ ***that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,***

¹⁷ ***so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,***

¹⁸ ***may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,***

¹⁹ ***and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.***

Only then does he entreat fellow believers;

Ephesians 4:1 (NASB)

¹ ***Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,***

Similar patterns are found in his letters to Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, often noted by the word **therefore**.

Before the apostle gives the admonition in the present text, he refers affectionately to his readers as **brethren**, identifying them as fellow Christian, those to whom God promises victory over the flesh.

He chooses a term of esteem and equality, not of superiority or paternalism, to refer to his brothers and sisters in Christ.

He then proceeds to set forth God's pattern for victory over the flesh.

As God's children indwelt by His Spirit, we have no **obligation to the flesh, to live according to the flesh**.

The flesh is the ugly complex of human sinful desires that includes the ungodly motives, affections, principle, purposes, words, and actions that sin generates through our bodies.

To live according to the flesh is to be ruled and controlled by that evil complex.

Because of Christ's saving work on our behalf, the sinful flesh no longer reigns over us, to debilitate us and drag us back into the pit of depravity into which we were all born.

For that reason, **we are** no longer ruled by **the flesh to live** by its sinful ways.

Those who **are living according to the flesh, must die**.

Now the Lord is not warning genuine believers that they may lose their salvation and be condemned to death if they fall back into some of the ways of the flesh. He has already given the absolute assurance that;

Romans 8:1 (NASB)

¹ ***Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***

He is rather saying that a person whose life is characterized by the things of **the flesh** is not a true Christian and is spiritually dead, no matter what his religious affiliations or activities may be.

If he does not come to Christ in true faith, he **must die** the second death under God's final judgment.

Paul next states the reason genuine Christians are no longer obligated to and bound by sin and are no longer under its condemnation.

Although there will always be some lingering influence of **the flesh** until we meet the Lord, we have no excuse for sin to continue to corrupt our lives.

The Christian's obligation is no longer to the flesh but to the **Spirit**.

We have the resources of the Spirit of Christ within us to resist and put to death the deeds of the body, which result from living according to the flesh.

Putting **to death the deeds of the body** is a characteristic of God's children.

The Scottish theologian David Brown wrote;

"If you don't kill sin, sin will kill you"

Jesus said;

Matthew 5:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹ ***"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.***

³⁰ ***"If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.***

No action is too drastic in dealing with sin; no price is too great to pay in turning from sin to trust Jesus Christ and thereby escaping the damnation of eternal death in hell.

Paul here gives one; of the many self-examination passages in Scripture. As noted above, the person who gives no evidence of the presence, power, and fruit of God's Spirit in his life has no legitimate claim to Christ as Savior and Lord.

The obvious other side of that truth is that the person whose life is characterized by the sinful ways of the flesh is still in the flesh and is not in Christ.

When Paul declares that believers are God's **"workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"**, he is stating a fact, not a wish. (**Eph. 2:10**)

Like many of the members of the church in Corinth, an immature and disobedient Christian will inevitably lapse into some of the ways of the flesh;

1 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)

¹ ***And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.***

Paul even after living as an apostle for many years, confessed that even he was not yet spiritually flawless;

Philippians 3:12-14 (NASB)

¹² *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

¹³ *Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,*

¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul had not yet achieved perfect righteousness in Christ, although that was the supreme objective of his life. Although his flesh sometimes held him back and temporarily interrupted the full joy of his fellowship with Christ his basic heart's desire was to obey and please his Lord.

If a professing Christian habitually lives in sin and shows no concern for repentance, forgiveness, worship, or fellowship with other believers, he proves that he claims the name of Christ in vain.

Many false Christians in the church work hard at keeping their lives pure in appearance, because other people think more highly of them for it and because they feel prouder of themselves when they act morally and benevolently than when they do not.

But feeling better about oneself, the popular psychological cure all for many people in our times, is the very heart of the proud sinful flesh, man's unredeemed selfishness and godless humanness.

Doing good for one's own sake rather than for God's is not doing good at all but is merely a hypocritical projection of the sin of self-love.

It should not be surprising that, as the world more and more advocates self-love and self-fulfillment, the problems of sexual promiscuity, abuse, and perversion, of stealing, lying murder suicide hopelessness and all other forms of moral and social ills are multiplying exponentially.

The pattern of a true believer's life, on the other hand, will show that he not only professes Christ but that he lives his life **by Christ's Spirit** and is habitually **putting to death** the sinful and ungodly **deeds of the body**.

Consequently, he **will live**, that is, possess and persevere to the fulness of eternal life given him in Christ.

When God ordered King Saul to destroy all of the Amalekites and their livestock, Saul did not completely obey, sparing King Agag and keeping the best animals.

When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul, the king tried to defend his actions by claiming his people insisted on keeping some of the flocks and that those animals would be sacrificed to God.

Samuel rebuked the king;

1 Samuel 15:22 (NASB)

²² *Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*

Despite the king's pleas for mercy, Samuel proceeds to proclaim;

1 Samuel 15:28 (NASB)

²⁸ *So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.*

Saul's failure to fully obey God cost him his throne.

God's people invariably fall back into sin when their focus turns away from the Lord, and back on themselves and to the things of the world.

It was for this reason that Paul admonished the believers at Colossae;

Colossians 3:1-3 (NASB)

¹ *Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

² *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

³ *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Then he gave a partial but representative list of sins that Christians should kill by considering themselves dead to them;

Colossians 3:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.*

⁶ *For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,*

⁷ *and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.*

⁸ *But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.*

⁹ *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,*

¹⁰ *and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—*

But here is the answer;

Romans 6:3-11 (NASB)

³ *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?*

⁴ *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

⁵ *For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,*

⁶ *knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;*

⁷ *for he who has died is freed from sin.*

⁸ *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*

⁹ *knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.*

¹⁰ *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

¹¹ *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*