

## **Two Ways to Live: Flesh vs. Spirit** **Romans 8:1-14**

### **I. Main Questions:**

1. How does this section of Scripture address the intense grief Paul related in Romans 7 concerning the Christian's intense struggle with sin?
2. How does it describe the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to break habits of sin?
3. What is the significance of Paul's assertion that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"?
4. What two ways of life are described in these verses? Why is it imperative to know which of these two ways of living accurately describes us?
5. According to this passage, how does the work of Christ on the cross and the work of the Spirit living in us combine to enable us to fulfill the Law in our daily lives?
6. What do we learn here about the importance of the mind—the way we think—on the way we live?
7. What does this passage teach us about the non-Christian, and how God sees him?

### **II. Verse by Verse Questions:**

#### verses 1-4: Christ's Death: The Basis for Deliverance from Sin

***Romans 8:1-4 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.***

1. How does Romans 8:1 signal a new era in Redemptive History for the human race? (1)
2. For whom is it true that there is no condemnation? How does Paul describe such blessed people in verse 1? How do verses 2-4 also help describe what kind of people will never be condemned?
3. What does Paul say is true of him in verse 2? What does "the law of the Spirit of life" refer to? What is the "law of sin and death"? How does the first set us free from the second? (2)
4. How does verse 3 help explain the expression "law of sin and death"? How is the law powerless? How did Christ's life and death achieve what the law never could? (3)
5. Why is it vital for us to understand the final phrase of verse 4, "who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"? Why is that qualification the key to understanding the freedom from condemnation Paul declares in verse 1? (4)

#### verses 5-11: Flesh vs. Spirit: Two Ways to Think, Two Ways to Live

***Romans 8:5-11 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. <sup>6</sup> The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup> the sinful***

*mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. <sup>8</sup> Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

6. How are verses 5-11 really just a clarification of what Paul means in verse 4? (4)
7. How is the mindset of the non-Christian so radically different from that of the Christian? (5)
8. Why is our thought life so incredibly vital? What is the connection between thinking and living?
9. How does Paul contrast the mind of the flesh with the mind controlled by the Spirit in verse 6?
10. How is the mind of the flesh in "hostility" against God? Why is it impossible for the mind of the flesh to submit to God's law? (7)
11. Paul adds that the man "in the flesh" cannot please God. Why is this so? (8)
12. How does verse 9 signal a major turn in Paul's presentation? What is the joyful news he relates in this verse to all Christians? (9)
13. What if someone does not have the Spirit of God living inside them? What is true of that person, according to verse 9?
14. What does Paul say is true of us in verse 10 if Christ lives in us by the Spirit? What does it mean that the "body is dead because of sin"? What does it mean that the spirit is alive because of righteousness? (10)
15. What is true if the Spirit of God is living in us, according to verse 11? How and when is this promise fulfilled? (11)

verses 12-14: The Absolute Obligation to Mortify the Deeds of the Body

*Romans 8:12-14 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

# Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers

John Owen

## I. Foundational Text: Romans 8:13

*KJV 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.*

*ESV Romans 8:13 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.*

A. The command/duty: Mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body – The key is to “kill” sin

“To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigour, and power, so that he cannot act or exert...” So it is in this case.

Definition: “The mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh is the constant duty of believers.”

B. Who must mortify? Christians! Those for whom there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1)

“The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.”

C. What must be mortified? Indwelling sin

Word “deeds” denotes the outward actions chiefly; but here the meaning is also the inward root from which the deeds of the flesh spring: “the axe is already laid at the root of the tree”... every lust intends to conceive and bring forth a perfect sin, even if it ends up aborted before that end.

D. How must the mortification of sin be carried out? By the Holy Spirit!

“All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit.... This is the work of the Spirit; by Him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about. Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.”

E. What promise is attached to this command/duty? Life!

“The life promised is opposed to the death threatened in the clause forgoing: ‘If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.’” But the word may go beyond our eternal life in heaven but include our ongoing experience of spiritual life here on earth with Christ: thus, it means “You shall live, you shall have a good, vigorous, comfortable, spiritual life while you are here, and obtain eternal life hereafter.”

## II. The Duty of the Best Believers, and the Evil of Neglecting this Duty

A. The duty of mortification is for Christians

***Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.***

“You must mortify! You must make it your daily work. You must be constantly at it while you live. Cease not a day from this work! **Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!** Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work”

B. Mortification is constantly necessary because of indwelling sin

***Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.***

***Romans 7:19-21 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.***

“When sin leaves us alone, we may leave 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.”

“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 (outcome)? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed upon; and it will be so whilst we live in this world.”

“I will discharge from this duty who can bring sin to ... a cessation of arms in this warfare; if it will spare him any one day, in any one duty,... let him say to his soul as to this duty, ‘Soul, take thy rest.’”

The only safety is “constant warfare.”

“Sin always aims at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if allowed to have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism... It is like the grave, that is never satisfied. And herein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin.”

C. Do many or only few people do this?

“There is a noise of religion and religious duties in every comer, preaching in abundance ... so that if you will measure the number of believers by light, gifts, and profession, the church may have cause to say ‘Who hath born me all these?’ But now if you will take the measure of them by this great discriminating grace of Christians [i.e. mortification], perhaps you will find their number not so multiplied.”

### **III. The Work of the Spirit in Mortification**

A. The great sovereign cause of all true mortification: The **Holy Spirit**

“The principle efficient cause of the performance of this duty is the Spirit ... all other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit”

#### B. Human strivings apart from the Spirit are false and will fail

“He only is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are as a thing of nought; and he is the great efficient of it—He works in us as he pleases.

#### C. Mortification is a special work of the Spirit of God

***Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.***

***Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***

***Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.***

### **IV. Usefulness of Mortification**

“The life, vigor, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.”

#### A. Unmortified sin attacks our souls

1. Sin *weakens* the soul and deprives it of strength
2. Sin *darkens* the soul and deprives it of light

“Sin is a cloud, a thick cloud, that spread itself over the face of the soul, and intercepts all the beams of God’s love and favor. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption; and if the soul begins to gather up thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them.”

#### B. Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them to grow in our hearts

“The life and fruitfulness of the soul is likened to a garden in which the plants of God’s grace flourish when they are not competing with weeds for nutrients”

***Matthew 13:22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.***

“If we are not active in mortification, noxious weeds of sin will crowd out the gentle plants of God’s grace and crowd them out”

#### C. Peace is impossible without mortification

“Peace must be sincere, and without vigorous slaying of sin, peace may actually be a false peace”

### **V. What Mortification is NOT**

- A. to mortify a sin is **not utterly to KILL**, root it out, and destroy it so that it should have no more hold at all, nor residence in our hearts

“It is true that this is what is aimed at, but it is not in this life to be accomplished.”

- B. to mortify a sin is (obviously) **not a dissimulation of sin** (i.e. hypocritical, external ‘triumph’ only... outwardly clean, secretly just as vile as before)
- C. to mortify a sin is **not to develop a quiet, sedate nature**
- D. to mortify a sin is **not to divert it to something else**

“A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted.”

“A man may be sensible of a lust, set himself against the eruptions of it, take care that it shall not break forth as it has done, but in the meantime allow the same habit to vent itself some other way.”

- E. to mortify a sin is not to have occasional conquests of it

## **VI. What Mortification IS...A Particular Described**

- A. A Habitual weakening of it

“Every lust is a depraved habit or disposition, continually inclining the heart to evil. ... [It is] in itself a strong, deeply-rooted, habitual inclination and bent of will and affections unto some actual sin... always stirring up imaginations, thoughts, and contrivances about what it lusts for.”

“Lust gets strength by temptation. When a suitable temptation falls in with a lust, it gives it a new life, vigor, power, violence, and rage, which it seemed not before to have or to be capable of.”

***Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.***

“A man may beat down the bitter fruit of an evil tree until he is weary; while the root abides in strength and vigor, the beating down of the present fruit will not hinder it from bringing forth more.”

- B. Consistent fighting and contending against sin
- C. Success against sin

“Frequent successes against any lust is another part and evidence of mortification. By success I understand not a mere disappointment of sin, that it was not able to bring forth its fruit, but a victory over it and pursuit of it to a complete conquest.”

## **VII. Universal Sincerity Required**

“All or nothing”: Unless a man attacks ALL sin wherever it may be found, no particular progress can be made either

***James 2:10 Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***

“Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained.”

“Hatred of sin as sin, not only as galling or disquieting, a sense of the love of Christ in the cross, lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification.”

### **VIII. Understand How Dangerous Sin Is**

“Get a clear and abiding sense upon thy mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of that sin with which you are perplexed.”

- A. Have a clear sense of the **guilt** of sin
- B. Have a clear sense of the **danger** of sin
  - a. Danger of a gradual hardening due to sin’s deceitfulness
  - b. Danger of temporal correction from the Lord (discipline, judgement, vengeance)

“O remember David and all his troubles! Look on him flying into the wilderness, and consider the hand of God upon him. Is it nothing to you that God should kill your child in anger, ruin your estate in anger, break your bones in anger, allow you to be a scandal and reproach in anger, kill you, destroy you, make you lie down in darkness, in anger? Is it nothing that he should punish, ruin, and undo *others* for your sake?... If you fear not these things, I fear you are [already] under hardness.”

- c. Danger of loss of peace and strength in your days
- d. Danger of eternal damnation

- 1) There is a strong connection in the scripture between continuing in sin and eternal destruction
- 2) Anyone who is so entangled in abiding sin can have no “clear prevailing evidence of his interest” in the covenant of salvation in Christ

- C. Have a clear sense of the **evils** of sin

### **IX. Further Advice on Mortification**

1. Labor to fill your conscience with the guilt of sin and the terrors of the law	5. Strongly guard against the first acting’s of your distemper
2. Long for deliverance from the power of sin, enflame your heart after freedom from sin	6. Meditate on the Glory of God, and debase your own pride
3. Determine if a sin is lodged in your natural temperament, and mortify it, it is no excuse	7. Do not speak peace to yourself before God speaks it.
4. Study the sins and temptations that have been successful against you, know your enemy	

### **X. Ready for Battle**

AD: Owen’s final word: All of the above is merely PREPARATION for mortification... not the actual mortification itself. Mortification only occurs at the moment of temptation. There the battle must be won.

AD: Only the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit are of any efficacy at the moment of temptation. All the above preparation will be for nothing if the Christian does not rely totally on Christ’s finished work on the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit at the key moment.