

The Presence & Promise of the Holy Spirit: Part 2
Romans 8:12-13

“...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Introduction: Ever since the Garden of Eden, men and women have experienced the differences between **union and communion**. Here is what I mean. See if this scenario has ever happened to you (or you’ve heard it happen to a friend). After a long day of work, taking care of the kids, making dinner, and getting things ready for the next day, you and your spouse have a massive misunderstanding and what some would call an argument. There are words exchanged, a shutdown of listening, and you go to bed with an icy block between you both. The following morning there are few words, lack of eye contact, and terse communication about the needs of the day. This continues on until there can be a true conversation, humility, and an offering and receiving of forgiveness with each other (which can take anywhere between one day and 50+ years).

Now, here is the difference between union and communion. These two are still married, have a marriage certificate to prove it, still wear a ring, and are fused in the **union of marriage**. But because there was sinful interaction, there is no longer **communion**, which would include intimate, life-giving, joyful *experience* of that union. One is a settled, sure, objective, and legal reality that cannot be changed (except for a divorce, but that is NOT what marriage was created or intended for). The other can change, is more subjective, can fluctuate and be disrupted and restored, sometimes in the same day. When we mix these up, it can get confusing and unhelpful. If we treat our **union LIKE communion**, we can live in anxiety, walking on eggshells, thinking one wrong move can end the whole thing. If we treat **communion LIKE union**, we can easily become *apathetic toward our spouse*, seeking to merely do the minimum, and reminding our spouse that we said “I love you” at the altar, and if anything changes, I’ll let you know.

Now this is NOT a sermon about marriage, but it is about what effects our communion with God, and how our union with him helps us deal with the thing that can affect our fellowship with Him: **our sin**. Back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had access to God Himself, and it seems clear that God would “walk in the Garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). To hear Him communicate directly with them was not unusual. He would give direct command (Gen. 2:18) and presented Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:22). Adam and Eve experienced what **Psalm 16:11** promises:

*“You make known to me the path of life; **in your presence there is fullness of joy**; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore”*

They experienced the fullness of true humanity, and the height of real happiness, experiencing unfettered fellowship with God Himself. But sin changed all of that. Not only did Adam and Eve experience physical, eternal, and spiritual death as a result of disobeying the command of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17; 3:6), but they were **put out of the Garden**, and they no longer would walk with God in the Garden.

This morning we will try to explain why it’s so important to aggressively, consistently, and ruthlessly deal with our sin as believers. We can and must do it **because we are united with Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit**, but also because we want to have **communion** with God, experiencing the satisfaction, rest, and joy offered IN HIM. BOTH of these are important, and without one or the other we will have the wrong directive and ability.

Last week I referenced a work by the Puritan **John Owen** called *“The Mortification of Sin”*, (published in 1656), a book for the hearty mind and brave heart. Often his work gets pulled out of context, making the fight against sin as an end in itself, rather than what he intended, as part of a larger series that remained unfinished called *“Communion with God”*. Here is what **Kelly Kapic**, a professor at Covenant College, commented about the purpose of Owen’s writing:

“Owen knew that God Himself is the source and goal of our happiness (or full joy). As Owen put it, ‘It was from eternity that God laid in His own bosom a design for our happiness’, which is nothing less than communion with God. Communion, for Owen, constituted true, deep, and life-giving happiness.

*The triune God of life and love made us to enjoy fellowship with Him, to love our neighbors, and to live in harmony with the earth. **Communion**, as interpersonal activity, is our mode of engaging God in the world as we were designed to do. We need to understand this construct to understand why Owen would emphasize an exercise that sounds so negative ---- **mortification!***

***SIN is that which disorders, disrupts, and destroys our communion**, so learning to deal with this threat is a necessary component of happiness.”*

This is the crux of the passage this morning. As true, redeemed, justified, born again believers, we have been given salvation apart from any law through the work of Jesus on the cross. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christ in us (Rom. 8:9-10), meaning that our **union with Him is sure and permanent**. Because of this union, we are called to walk in obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17) and **put to death the deeds of our flesh**, so that we can live. Though our bodies will die as a result of sin, we know that we, one day, will be freed from this mortal cage and our sin nature. Until that day, we must learn to **walk by the Spirit so that we can deal rightly with our sin**, enjoying unfettered joy in God’s presence.

The Promises to the Indwelt by the Spirit

*So then, brothers, we are **debtors**, not to the flesh, to **live** according to the flesh. 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**.*

After clarifying the reality of the indwelling of the Spirit, he now lays out several **implications or responsibilities we have in light of it**. The two are these: **we are now NO LONGER DEBTORS but we ARE WARRIORS**.

DEBTORS – This word means “obligation”, the same word Paul used in 1:14 and his obligation to reach Greeks and barbarians. The language of debt and obligation is cautionary, since we want to make sure that our motivations to obey or deal with sin is NOT out of a check the box, you-did-this-for-me-so-I-should-do-this-for-you mindset. Notice in the language of verse 13, there is what **Thomas Schreiner** calls a *“provocative absence”*, in that he says we are debtors “not to the flesh”, but he does NOT finish the thought ---- you ARE debtors to the Spirit. Paul is majoring on a fact that is true of all believers, not just a quality of life that we’re trying to attain. The argument is like this:

Sin **was our former master, one that had mastery and exercised dominion over us, and one that we owed an immeasurable debt**. BUT, in Christ and with the Spirit, we are NO LONGER BOUND to live according to the flesh, no longer have to say ‘yes’ to its temptations, and to whom we owe nothing since our debt has been completely satisfied.

WARRIORS – The key phrase in verse 13 is “put to death”, a violent word that is used for ‘murder’ or ‘causing the death’ of someone. It does not seem like a word Christians today use very much, but for Paul, it was of utmost importance (used again in Col. 3:5). The object of murder in our life are the **deeds of the body/flesh**, and the verb used is in the **present tense**, meaning it is an ongoing reality. The verb is NOT an imperative ---- meaning not a command --- but rather in the **indicative**, which means a state of reality (though the imperative can overlap here). The Puritans popularized the phrase “Mortification of Sin”, and **John Owen** famously said:

*“Do you **mortify**; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; **be killing sin or it will be killing you.**”*

What does this mean? **Mortification** means to harness and summon their wills to overcome sin, which desires to manifest itself in bodily actions (Schreiner). It means we seek to **starve sin at its root**, cutting off the oxygen supply, and **replacing sin with better promises and reliance on Christ**. It demands active, ruthless, persistent action, since our sin does not play fair, has no rules, and is doggedly determined to take us down. For a justified believer who is indwelt by the Spirit, putting sin to death is **NOT OPTIONAL but assumed, not a nice addition to life, but an essential practice of our NEW LIFE**. In fact, John Calvin said the work of mortification is also **vivification**, or making alive.

But we must remember that fighting our sin is NOT an act of sheer will power, but is rooted in the reality of our **justification by faith, our assurance of security in the future, and a key phrase in this verse: BY THE SPIRIT!!!** What does that mean? It means we exercise our will out of a new identity and presence of the indwelling Spirit.

There must be **proactive effort** in killing sin, but it cannot be done by **willpower alone**. How many have tried diets this way? You try to cut out sugar by willing yourself not to eat it, but it only lasts so long before you succumb to that gloriously glazed donut, and once you’re off the wagon, you begin to indulge again. Unless you have a **plan, replace sugar with something better/healthier, and have help around you**, your plan will certainly fail.

Willpower to try to fight sin will fail as well. It goes like this: You set out to kill sin driven by **fear, guilt, pride, or a desire to maintain an image of yourself**. It feels right and good to start, but it will largely be done by yourself. When there is **success**, it produces pride, more self-sufficiency, and creates a judgmental attitude toward others who have not figured it out yet. When there is **failure**, it creates shame, desire to hide, or give up entirely. The **reality** is that willpower alone seeks to control the **external factors, symptoms, and behaviors** rather than addressing the root cause and move toward transformation. Willpower mortification leads to pharisaical legalism, setting up rules to keep and standards that no one can fulfill, since it is NOT done by faith, but works of the law.

Willpower alone will hack at the weeds of sin, where the work of the Spirit attacks the root of sin, digging it out of the ground so that it does not grow back. In my backyard lawn I get constant a constant weed that insidiously spreads with tentacles that burrow under the other grass for many feet.

But mortifying sin by the Spirit is completely different. It is born out of a **love for God**, since we love because He first loved us. It is out of a desire to **please Him** (Rom. 8:8; Heb. 11:6 – ‘without faith it is impossible to please God’), **honor and glorify God**. It is born out of sheer dependency on His empowerment, and moves forward in decisions anchored in Him. Victory over sin breeds **humility, growing dependence, and compassion toward others**. When there is failure, we fight to believe the

assuring promises of God and respond out of conviction, quickly repenting, and run toward God by **grace alone**. The goal is not merely external conformity but continued heart transformation from a true, dependent love of God.

John Piper reminds us that **‘by the Spirit’** means that we must “set our minds on the Spirit” (Romans 8:5-6), rather than the flesh. The battle begins in our thinking and moves to our desires, and that is where the fight rages. The only way to set our minds on the things of the Spirit is to set our minds on the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:13-14), and using the **Sword of the Spirit** (Eph. 6:17). There are NO shortcuts in this. And the only way to sever the root of sin is to put our trust in better promises by the **hearing with faith, not the works of the law** (Gal. 3:5).

Is there a way of thinking through this everyday so that we are NOT merely using willpower to fight our sin but walking by the Spirit to put our sin to death SO THAT we can pursue God in Christ wholeheartedly?

1. **Identify the Source** – The first step in putting our sin to death is understanding the identifying the sin that needs to die. Remember, sin disorders, disrupts, and destroys our communion, and this can be areas of **co-mission and omission**, the things we do and don’t do. Sin can be an area we are engaging in like envy or neglecting like prayer or understanding God’s Word (Hosea 4:6). But if we identify an area of thought (anger) or action (complaining), the issue is NOT simply the cessation of the activity but getting to the heart behind it. *Why am I complaining? Is it because I am not content with what the Lord has given me? Do I think He’s giving me less than I deserve?* Often the source behind a sin of our flesh has a direct line to our view of God, which is too low, and a wrong view of self, which tends to be too high.
2. **Starve the Source** – Once sin is identified, Paul later writes that we are to give it no quarter, to not let it continue in our thinking. In Romans 13:14, he says to “make no provision for the flesh”, with means give no foresight or continued contemplation of the sin but to turn to thinking in a new, Biblical way (what we just talked about with Piper’s insights).

Romans 13:14 – *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”*

3. **Source your Identity** – But identifying and starving our sin can easily become an act of sheer willpower rather than reliance on the Spirit. To see how these two are combined, we’ll look quickly at a key text in **putting sin to death** in Colossians 3.

*If then you have been **raised with Christ**, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and **your life is hidden with Christ** in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

⁵ **Put to death** therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you **must put them all away**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, **which is being renewed in knowledge** after the image of its creator.

Notice four important steps here:

- 1) Our identity is defined as being **raised with Christ** and our life is **hidden with Christ**. These are union issues that will not change. We must remember WHO WE ARE when dealing with sin, so that we can have the **hope** of one day appearing with Him in glory.
 - 2) We are to **both seek & set our minds on things above**, meaning our minds are moved from intake of worldly thoughts to heavenly ones, from those things that move our hearts away from God to truthful realities in Him.
 - 3) We then actively **put to death and put away** the identified sins of our heart and flesh. Notice some sins are **desire** sourced (covetousness, evil desire), some action (obscene talk) and some both (sexual immorality and impurity).
 - 4) Extremely important, we can do this because we are **being renewed in knowledge**. WE HAVE to get the knowledge, but “being renewed” is a passive verb, meaning it is something being done IN US. The Spirit uses the Word to continue to **renew, or make new, our life**.
- 4. Replace the Sin** – Paul follows this up with the all-important idea of replacement of sin, the putting off of sin so that we can put on righteousness. This is exemplified in characteristics and actions like kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love (Colossians 3:12-15), which breeds *the peace of Christ with giving thanks to God* (Col. 3:15, 17). This combines the thought that killing sin means **pursuing something better by believing better promises**. Sin promises and always under delivers. The promises of God’s Word in the Spirit are always satisfying when we take them by faith. This is why next week at the difference between **security and assurance**, where we can actively know that we are adoptive sons and daughters with a secure inheritance in the future.

There is a battle raging each day in our minds and hearts, and the worst thing that can happen to any of us is if we think it is merely peacetime. We get lax, thinking it’s no big deal to neglect our Bible’s, or prayer, or hearing the Word preached, or having true, intimate fellowship with other Spirit filled believers. If you are a believer, you **have the Spirit, and if you have the Spirit, you CAN kill your sin, but you must engage in the process by faith**. We are either killing sin, or sin is killing us. We are NOT debtors, but we are Warriors, but fight with the power of the One that dwells in us.