



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### The Mortification of Sin...

### Romans 8:12-13

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 8:12**...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,

There's no way to say it and make it sound any better.

We had decided we would kill him and we had decided we would do it together. Now, you would never have guessed our intention by just looking at us. We looked like any normal threesome. We looked like a grandfather and two young grandsons just puttering around. And that is, of course, what we actually were.

But in our hearts, we were something different; in our hearts, we were killers.

Now, in case, I am making you nervous let me set your minds at ease. We were not talking about killing a person. We weren't even talking about killing an animal. We were talking about killing a snake, and in East Texas a snake is not considered to be an animal.

You see my grandfather kept chickens and they are prone to about every kind of predator you can imagine. But the worst kind of predator, to our way of thinking, was a snake. They are almost impossible to keep out. They are hard to kill. They are so serpentine.

And we had one.

We had started losing eggs. Then, we started losing little chicks. So we decided we were going to kill him. And to kill him we decided to be as cunning as we knew how. So, my grandfather bought some glass eggs at the feed store and we spread them out through several of the chicken boxes. Now glass eggs look just like ordinary eggs but they are made out of glass. Now the idea is pretty simple. You put a glass egg in a box with other chicken eggs and hope that eventually the snake will make a mistake and come along and swallow one. You see the moment a snake makes the mistake of swallowing a glass egg he is a dead snake. If he manages to break the egg, the shards of glass will kill him. If he can't break the egg, it will still kill him by stopping up his digestive tract. So every morning, we would go out and check the nest boxes to see if any of the glass eggs were missing.

Anyway, we went out every morning and looked in the nest boxes for about a week only to gather our eggs in frustration and disappointment. And then one morning, it happened. As we looked through the nest boxes where we had placed the glass eggs we noticed that sure enough one of the glass eggs was gone. My grandfather told us to spread out to see if we could find the snake.

We looked everywhere.

Finally, my grandfather found him in a rain barrel that stood near the corner of the chicken coop. He leaned over and looked into the barrel and then jerked his head back as a very unhappy six-foot long chicken snake lunged up toward his face. My grandfather then stuck a garden hoe over in the barrel and after some maneuvering jerked that chicken snake out of the barrel onto the ground in the middle of the chicken coop. Both chickens and grandsons scattered.

When I was safe distance away, I turned to watch my grandfather and the snake. He had the snake's head pinned down to the ground with his hoe. I could see our glass egg bulging in the snake's middle. I figured my grandfather would just lift the hoe and let the snake slither off because that snake was for all practical purposes as good as dead. But that is not what he did.

Instead he turned to my cousin and me and winked and then lifted the hoe and began to chop that snake into a hundred pieces. Looking back on it now I can see that he took great satisfaction in the moment.

Now, I tell you that story both because I like it and because it is a reflection of the mindset that the Apostle Paul has in our passage this morning. You see Paul tells us that we are to apply ourselves to kill the sin that remains in our hearts. We are to actually and purposely set about to kill the sin that remains in us.

Now, of course, there is a sense, a real sense, in which our sin has already been put to death. Our sin and our old self were crucified with Christ. Paul has already spoken about that earlier in Romans. Turn with me for a moment back to Romans 6:1.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 6:1**...What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 6:5**...If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. <sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- <sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Now, I don't want to give any false impression about what Paul meant when he said we have died to sin. He did not mean that we have become sinless. He did not mean anything like that. But he did mean that we are free from the damnation of sin and we are free from sin's dominion...from both its penalty and its power. Because of Christ's death on the cross in our place, we have been covered with His righteousness. Our sin was placed on Him and His righteousness covers us. We have been transferred from one kingdom to another. We have been transferred from a kingdom of darkness to a kingdom of light. We have been transferred of out of the kingdom of God's enemies to the kingdom of God's friends. Now because all of that is true, Paul insists that we begin to think of ourselves in a new way. That is why he says in Romans 6:11...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 6:11**...In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Now think about what he is saying. He is saying, **"Look at yourselves differently. Think of yourselves differently. You are dead to sin now. Think of yourselves as alive only to God."**

It is only after Paul makes the point that we are to think of ourselves in this whole new light that he goes on to give the Romans further instruction. Look at what he says in verses 12 and 13.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 6:12...** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Do you get the progression in Paul's thought?

If not, here it is. First, Christ has redeemed us from sin. Therefore, we ought to look at ourselves in a whole new light. We are a new creation. We ought to look at ourselves as we now are; we are dead to sin.

Secondly, since we are alive to Christ and dead to sin, we ought to stop presenting our bodies as instruments of sin. Instead we ought to act just like a person that has been raised from the dead because that is in fact what has happened.

Now in chapter 7 of Romans Paul discusses the difficulty of the believer's struggle with indwelling sin and we could read at length about difficult that struggle is but I am not going to do that because I suspect it is something that you already know about first hand.

Finally in chapter 8 he writes the verses that I read at the very beginning and that's where I want to spend the remainder of my time. Look at them again.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 8:12...**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,

Do you see the “...so then...” That’s Paul’s way of saying, **“Alright then, here is the conclusion.”** And what is his conclusion? **His conclusion is that “we are no longer under obligation to the flesh.”** This is one of those places in Scripture where the thought is left incomplete but is still obvious. It is, in fact, easy to finish the statement. We are no longer under obligation to the flesh because now we are under obligation to the Spirit. It is the Spirit who has regenerated our hearts and given us new life. It is the Spirit that indwells us.

And what is that obligation?

It is the obligation to live a righteous life.

One of the funniest things in the world is a man about to be married. I don’t know exactly how many couples I have married or counseled for marriage but I always like to ask the men how they see themselves in ten years. Men always and I mean always, answer the same way. **“Well, of course, I want to be actively involved with my wife and my kids but I also want to keep my old friends like they are now. I don’t expect that my relationship to my buddies will change that much.”**

I never tell them that they are about to be transferred from one kingdom to another. I never tell them that what they think is going to happen is so far from what will actually happen because I know that they would not believe it. I never

tell them that will wake up in the middle of the night one night and it will dawn on them with the intensity of a thunderstorm that they now have a completely different set of obligations. I never tell them that the first time they hold their newborn son or daughter that a whole new world of obligation will sweep down on their mind and heart like a flood. I never tell them that what they think is just the next natural step in successful dating is actually a cosmic shift in their life; it is a celestial realigning of their universe.

But Paul does come right out and say it. And that is what Paul is saying here. We have a whole new obligation to live righteously. I want you to keep that in mind because I think it will help you to see the way Paul's thought is connected all the way back to what he said earlier in chapter 6. You see this is really the conclusion to the thought that he had there and there is a progression. Let me repeat it to you and add this last idea. Here it is.

First, Christ has redeemed us from sin so we ought to look at ourselves in a whole new way. We are a new creation and we are dead to sin.

Secondly, since we are alive to Christ and dead to sin we ought to stop presenting our bodies as instruments of sin.

Finally and here is the conclusion. Not only should we no longer allow sin to reign in our bodies we actually ought to seek out and kill the sinful deeds that remain. The Reformers had a name for this last step. They called it the mortification of sin. Now let be clear here. The mortification of sin is not some sort of sadomasochism. It is not taking some perverted pleasure in self-inflicted pain. Nor is it rejecting the fact that we have bodies and natural bodily appetites.

It is rather, as John Stott says, a clear-sighted recognition of evil as evil, leading to such a decisive rejection of it that no imagery can do it justice except **'putting to death'**. To say it even plainer it is looking at sin and saying, **"You know that is sin and I am done with it."**

In fact, Paul uses the strongest of all possible terms to describe what we are to do. He uses a term that was often used about those under the death penalty. He uses a term that describes an execution. And that teaching is not new with Paul. In fact, it is an elaboration of Jesus' own command: **'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'** Since the Romans compelled a condemned criminal to carry his cross to the site of crucifixion, to carry our cross is symbolic of following Jesus to the place of execution. And what we are to put to death there, Paul explains, is the misdeeds of the body, that is, every use of our eyes, ears, mouth, hands or feet which serves ourselves instead of God and other people.

Now, how does mortification take place? The thing I want you to notice is that it is something that we have to do. It is not a question of dying or of being put to death, but of putting to death. In the work of mortification we are not simply to be couch potatoes; we are not to wait for it to be done to us or for us. On the contrary, we are responsible for putting our sinful deeds to death. Now it is true that Paul immediately adds that we can put to death the misdeeds of the body only by the Spirit, by his agency and power. Only He can give us heart to hate our sin and the courage to kill it.

Now let me see if I can be practical for a moment. Let's say a man is a Christian and is tempted to be a thief. How should he respond to that temptation?

First, of course, he should look the temptation in the eye and call it what it is. **“You know to steal is a sin and would bring dishonor on the Savior that died for me. I will have nothing to do with it.”**

Secondly, he should track the desire that he has to steal back to its source. **“Oh Lord, forgive me for my covetousness. Forgive me for my lack of satisfaction with the estate you have put me in. Forgive me for my ingratitude to accept where you have placed me in life. Help me to live with gratitude for all you have done.”**

Thirdly, he should seek the relief of the Holy Spirit. **“Oh Holy Spirit, remove from me I pray the desire to steal. Place in me a holy hatred for thievery. Remove from me a desire to possess without labor. Give me patience to work and save to acquire. Let me not bring reproach upon the name of Christ and keep before my eyes the impact my being a thief will have on my wife, my children and the generations of children that will follow them, my mother and my father. Most of all, of Holy Spirit remind me of the sacrifice my Savior paid to redeem me from the sin of being a thief.”**

Finally, a man should resolve not to put himself into a situation where he has the opportunity to steal and if the opportunity presents itself he should run from it like Joseph from Potiphar’s wife.

Or let’s say a man is facing sexual temptation, how should he respond. First, of course, he should look the temptation in the eye and call it what it is. **“You know this unrighteous desire I have is a sin and brings dishonor on the Savior that died for me. I will have nothing to do with it.”**

Secondly, he should track the desire that he has back to its source. **“Oh Lord, forgive me for my ingratitude. Forgive me for my ingratitude to accept where you have placed me in life. Help me to live with gratitude either for the wife you have give me or for the one you have not given me.”**

Thirdly, he should seek the relief of the Holy Spirit. **“Oh Holy Spirit, remove from me I pray this desire. Place in me a holy hatred for all sexual impurity. Remove from me a desire to possess that, which is not lawfully mine.”**

Let me not bring reproach upon the name of Christ and keep before my eyes the impact this sin would have on my wife, my children and the generations of children that will follow them, my mother and my father. Most of all, of Holy Spirit remind me of the sacrifice my Savior paid to redeem me from the sin of sexual impurity. Finally, a man should resolve not to put himself into a situation where he has the opportunity to be impure. That may mean fewer movies; it may mean no movies of a specific type. It may mean no television at all. It may mean ripping your computer out of the wall and setting it out on the curb for the garbage men to fight over. What it means for you may be different for you than what it means for me but do not be deceived about this. The Scriptural command to mortify sin in your life demands that you do something. It demands that you track down sin in your life and cut it into a hundred pieces.

Now, why is it important that you should do so? It is important because it is the command of God and because a life without which there is some progress in sanctification is no Christian life at all.

Now, you may be thinking this is just more legalism. You may be thinking it is too much to ask. You may be thinking, **“No, really what you are asking me to do is impossible.”** My answer to all that is that I am asking to live in gratitude for what the Lord Jesus has accomplished in your life.

And I want you contemplate for a moment what He accomplished on your behalf. He denied Himself and the worship of 10,000 angels to descend to earth and to take upon Himself a body of flesh. He suffered the scorn and dishonor of a sinner in the place of sinners. He allowed Himself to be spat upon and to be handled by rude and coarse men when a simple word from Him would have dissolved all of Creation into less than nothing. He took up the cross to suffer the wrath of God in the place of sinners in order that sinners might be redeemed from their sin. He regenerated our hearts and made us new men and women. And brothers and sisters if we have placed our hope and trust in Him will indeed stand before in glory one day face to face.

If I could be with you on that day and ask you, **“Brother, what is your opinion now of that sin you struggled with for so many years. What of the suffering that you endured in mortifying sin in your life? What do you say now to the self-denial and cross-bearing that you had to endure? I suspect that in that day you will say, ‘What are you kidding? What was all that compared to being His presence?’”**

A few months ago I had the privilege of going up to Colorado Springs to attend a Bible conference in which Dr. James Montgomery Boice was the plenary speaker. It was a conference on covenant theology. At one point Dr. Boice was talking about the Adam and Eve’s first full realization of the impact of their sins. He

said, **“You know I can just imagine what it must have been like when Adam and Eve had their sin exposed. God had come down and killed a couple of animals to cover them. I don’t know whether the animals killed were lambs or goats. But as far as I know I think it must have been the first time they had ever seen anything killed”.**

Dr. Boice said (and I don’t think I will ever forget this), **“You know I just imagine in my mind’s eye Adam and Eve saying to themselves, ‘Oh, that is what you meant by death. We certainly never thought that is what it would be like. We never knew our sin would lead to something like that.’”**

Obviously, they had come to a full realization of what sin was. I thought about that this earlier this week when I got the news that Dr. Boice had died. I thought to myself, **“You know Dr. Boice has been such a faithful articulator of the glory of the gospel all these years. And now finally he is experiencing the glory of Christ’s forgiveness and Christ’s great work of redemption and probably thinking to himself, ‘Oh now I see just how glorious Christ is.’”**

Now I expect if we were to ask Dr. Boice today, **“Was the struggle with sin worthwhile?”** He would say to us, **“Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. Oh that I had done more to mortify sin in my flesh for the glory of Christ.”**

Let’s Pray.