

“How to Kill Sin”

John Piper

Part One

Now this morning we have returned to Romans 8 to pick up where we left off on December 16. But I am still trumpeting Planting a Passion, and I am still working to build "justice-pursuing" churches, and I am still pleading for God to create coronary Christians, because that is what verses 12-13 help me do. If you are going to be the kind of person who gets up when you get knocked down and instead of planning revenge, plans fresh strategies of love; and instead of questioning God, submits to his wise and good sovereignty; and instead of whining, rejoices in tribulation and is refined like steel, then you will have to learn to kill the sins of self-pity and pride and grudge-holding and loving the praise of man. In other words, coronary Christians who joyfully press on in some great Cause of love and justice don't come out of nowhere. They come out of the fiery furnace of warfare with sin – fought mainly in their own souls.

Let's look at verses 12-13, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh [literally: we are debtors 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." If you are going to be a coronary, justice-pursuing, Passion-planting Christian – or, for that matter, any kind of Christian who inherits life and not death – Paul says you must not be the debt-paying slave of the flesh – that old rebellious, insubordinate, self-sufficient nature we all have (Romans 8:7). "Brethren, we are debtors *not* to the flesh, to live according to the flesh" – we owe the flesh nothing but enmity and war. Don't dally with your destroyer. Don't be a debtor to your destroyer. Get out debt to the flesh, don't pay for your own destruction.

How? we ask. That's what verse 13 describes. If you are going to be a coronary, justice-pursuing, Passion-planting, free-from-debt-to-fatal-flesh Christian, you must be skilled at killing your own sins. This is dangerous language here, so be careful. Don't think about other people's sins. Don't think about how people wrong you. Think about your own sins. That's what Paul is talking about. Verse 13b: "But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of [your!] body, you will live."

John Owen on Mortification of Sin

The great teacher of the church on this doctrine is John Owen. Nobody has probed it more deeply, probably. He wrote a little 86-page book called *Mortification of Sin in Believers*. "Mortify" means "kill" in 17th century English. Today it just means "embarrass" or "shame." But Owen was talking about this verse – in fact, his whole book is an exposition of this verse, Romans 8:13. He put it like this: "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

My mother wrote in my Bible when I was 15 years old – I still have the Bible – "This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Now Owen says, based on Romans 8:13, "Be killing sin or [sin] will be killing you." We will see that these two mottos are very closely connected, because Romans 8:13 says that we are to put be putting sin to death *by the Spirit* – "If *by the Spirit* you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" – and what is the instrument of death wielded by the Spirit? The answer is given in Ephesians 6:17 – "the sword of the Spirit, the word of God." This book will keep you from sin – this book will kill sin. We'll come back to this in two weeks.

But for now I just want you to see how everything in these recent weeks is connected. We thought we were taking a detour from Romans since December 16, but it turns out that we were really simply giving application of what happens when Christians put to death the deeds of the body. They become coronary, marathon, God-centered, Christ-exalting, justice-pursuing, passion-planting Christians.

So now, what would be helpful to know in order to experience what Romans 8:13 is calling for? Well, I see four questions that would be helpful to answer so that we can be about this crucial duty of killing sin.

What are "the deeds of the body" when Paul says, "If by the Spirit you kill the deeds of the body, you will live"? Surely not all the deeds of the body are to be killed. The body is supposed to be an instrument of righteousness. So what are the deeds of the body that are to be killed?

What does killing them mean? Do they have life that we should take away? What will killing them involve?

What does "by the Spirit" mean? The Spirit is himself God. He is not a lifeless instrument in our hands to wield as we wish. The very

thought of having the Spirit in my hand gives me the shivers of disrespect. I am in *his* hand, aren't I? Not he in mine. *He* is the power, not me. How am I to understand this killing of sin "by the Spirit"? Does this threat of death mean that I can lose my salvation? Verse 13a: "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die." This is spoken to the whole church at Rome. And death here is eternal death and judgment. We know that, because *everyone* – whether you live according to the flesh or not – dies a physical death. So the death this verse warns about is something more, something that happens only to *some* and not to others. So the question remains: can we die eternally if we have justified by faith? If so what becomes of our assurance, and if not why does Paul threaten us all with death if we live according to the flesh and tell us to be about the business of killing sin?

So let's start here with this last question and then take up the others in two weeks. What we should take away this morning is a general sense of how justification relates to sin-killing; and how crucial it is that we do it.

Does the Threat of Death Imply We Can Lose Our Salvation?

You know my answer: No, someone who is justified by faith alone apart from works of the law cannot die in this sense of eternal death. One of my main reasons for believing this is found in this chapter in verse 30. In this verse Paul argues that salvation from beginning to end is a work of God with every part linked to the other in an unbreakable chain. Romans 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." Here the link between justification and glorification is certain. If you have been justified by faith you will be glorified. That is, you will be brought to eternal life and glory. The chain will not be broken: Predestination, calling, justification, glorification.

Killing Sin Is the Result and Evidence of Justification

So the question then is why does Paul say to the church in Rome – and to Bethlehem – (verse 13) "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"? The reason is this: Putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit – the daily practice of killing sin in your life – is the result of being justified and the evidence that you are

justified by faith alone apart from works of the law. If you are making war on your sin, and walking by the Spirit, then you know that you have been united with Christ by faith alone. And if you have been united to Christ, then his blood and righteousness provide the unshakable ground of your justification.

On the other hand, if you are living according to the flesh – if you are not making war on the flesh, and not making a practice out of killing sin in your life, then there is no compelling reason for thinking that you are united to Christ by faith or that you are therefore justified. In other words, putting to death the deeds of the body is not the way we get justified, it's one of the ways God shows that we are justified. And so Paul commands us to do it – be killing sin – because if we don't – if we don't make war on the flesh and put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit – if growth in grace and holiness mean nothing to us – then we show that we are probably false in our profession of faith, and that our church membership is a sham and our baptism is a fraud, and we are probably not Christians after all and never were.

Killing Sin Is the Effect, not the Cause, of Our Justification

This is a good place to review and reestablish the great foundation for our call for coronary, justice-pursuing Christians. Are we calling for you to live this way so that you will get justified, or are we calling for you to live this way because this is the way justified sinners live? Is the pursuit of justice and love "by the Spirit" with life-long perseverance the cause or the effect of being set right with God? Let Wilberforce answer. Here was a man who had a passion for holiness and righteousness and justice greater than anyone in his day perhaps. When he wrote his book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, to trumpet this passion for justice and for political engagement in the cause of righteousness, here is what he said, Christianity is a scheme "for justifying *the ungodly*" [Romans 4:5], by Christ's dying for them "*when yet sinners*" [Romans 5:6-8], a scheme "for reconciling us to God" – *when enemies* [Romans 5:10]; and for making the fruits of holiness *the effects, not the cause*, of our being justified and reconciled.

We have spent almost four years laying the foundation for understanding Romans 8. The first five chapters of Romans demonstrate that the only way for us sinners to be declared righteous in God's sight is by having righteousness reckoned to us – credited to

us, imputed to us – by grace, through faith, on the basis of Christ's perfect life and death, and not on the basis of our own works. God is just and justifies the ungodly who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). With that stunning and unspeakably wonderful foundation laid, Paul has to ask in chapter 6, two times: Verse 1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" Verse 15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" And all of chapters 6 and 7 is written to show that justification by faith alone apart from works *does not* and *cannot* lead a person to make peace with sin.

Paul answers his own question in Romans 6:1, "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" We can't. If we died to sin by being united with Jesus in his death, we can't stay married to sin. The faith that unites us to Christ disunites from his competitors. The faith that makes peace with God makes war on our sin. If you are not at odds with sin, you are not at home with Jesus, *not* because being at odds with sin makes you at home with Jesus, but because being at home with Jesus makes you at odds with sin.

Therefore, I call you and urge you, for the sake of being God-centered, Christ-exalting, soul-winning, justice-pursuing, passion-planting, coronary Christians, don't live according to the flesh but "by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body." Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. From Piper, "How to Kill Sin, Part 1 February 2, 2002

Part 2

Ed Welch, in preparation for his book called *A Banquet in the Grave* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2001), said: . . . there is a mean streak to authentic self-control. . . Self-control is not for the timid. When we want to grow in it, not only do we nurture an exuberance for Jesus Christ, we also demand of ourselves a hatred for sin. . . . The only possible attitude toward out-of-control desire is a declaration of all-out war. . . . There is something about war that sharpens the senses . . . You hear a twig snap or the rustling of leaves and you are in attack mode. Someone coughs and you are ready to pull the trigger. Even after days of little or no sleep, war keeps us vigilant.

There is a mean, violent streak in the true Christian life! But violence against whom, or what? Not other people. It's a violence against all the impulses in us that would be violent to other people. It's a violence against all the impulses in our own selves that would

make peace with our own sin and settle in with a peacetime mentality. It's a violence against all lust in ourselves, and enslaving desires for food or caffeine or sugar or chocolate or alcohol or pornography or money or the praise of men and the approval of others or power or fame. It's violence against the impulses in our own soul toward racism and sluggish indifference to injustice and poverty and abortion.

Christianity is not a settle-in-and-live-at-peace-with-this-world-the-way-it-is kind of religion. If by the Spirit you kill the deeds of your own body, you will live. Christianity is war. On our own sinful impulses.

1. What Are "The Deeds of the Body" that We Are to Kill?

Paul is picking up here on what he had said already in Romans 6. So go back there with me and let's remind ourselves of a few things. Take three verses to shed light on Romans 8:13.

First, Romans 6:13, "Do not present your members [=your bodies] to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." What then are "the deeds of the body" that we are to kill? They are those deeds that we are about to do (you kill them before they happen) when our bodies are "instruments of unrighteousness."

Second, Romans 6:12, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." When the mortal body is taken captive by sin and made to obey lusts, then and there we see "deeds of the body" that should be put to death.

Third, Romans 6:6, "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." I cite this verse to remind you of the all-important distinctively Christian truth about killing the sinful actions of the body, namely, in union with Jesus Christ by faith alone, you are already dead to sin and alive to God, and what you are doing when you put to death the deeds of the body is becoming in practice what you are in Christ. "Our old self was crucified, in order that our body of sin might be done away with!" When Christ died, we died in him if we are united to him by faith. And we died with him so that we might demonstrate this death by putting to death the sinful deeds of the body. Because we already have the victory we can succeed in our violence against sin! He breaks the power of *cancelled* sin. We can

only kill the sin that has already been killed when we were killed in Christ. This is Christianity, not moral self improvement.

So the answer to the first question, "What are the deeds of the body in Romans 8:13?" is the deeds that we are about to do prompted by sin or lust or unrighteousness. Sin is deeper than deeds. The deeds are the instrument of the sin. And when that is what our bodies are about to do – go over to the side of the enemy – we put that action to death. In this war with ourselves, traitors are put to death.

2. What Is This Putting to Death?

The answer is that you suffocate the sinful deeds of the body. You cut off the life-line, the blood flow. Deeds of the body come from somewhere. Jesus said, "The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. (20) These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man" (Matthew 15:18-20). Sinful deeds have a life line that must be cut. In other words, there is a condition of the heart that gives rise to the "deeds of the body." It's a heart issue. We must cut off the hands and gouge out the eyes, not literally – that would do no good – but with that kind of violent heart-work. You kill the bad fruit by severing the bad root.

What's the bad root of "the deeds of the body"? You can see it in Romans 8:7. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." The root of "the deeds of the body" that have to be killed is the flesh that is hostile to God and unwilling and unable to submit to him. Verse 12: "If you live according to the *flesh* you will die." Flesh is the great enemy here. And it's an enemy because it is insubordinate and hostile to God. It doesn't like God and does not want to be told by him what to do.

So to kill "the deeds of the body" that this enmity produces, you have to cut the life-line. Pinch the air pipe. Stop the blood flow. Deeds must be killed before they happen by severing the root of hostility and insubordination that rejects God.

3. How Do You Do This "By the Spirit"?

Let's get at answer by following three steps, each with a different text.

Step One: Set Your Mind on the Things of the Spirit

Step #1. Notice Romans 8:5-6 and how Paul speaks there of the flesh and the Spirit (the same pair he contrasts here in verse 13): "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, [set their minds on] the *things of the Spirit*. (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death (as verse 13a says!), but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (as verse 13b says)." So the first step in the answer is this: putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit involves "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit." You don't just look at the temptation and say NO. You do that! But if you are going to put it to death *by the Spirit*, you have to do more: you direct your mind, your heart, your spiritual focus another way, namely to the "things of the Spirit."

Step Two: Set Your Mind on the Words of God and the Realities They Stand For

Step #2. What are "the things of the Spirit"? If we are going to rivet our minds and hearts on them in the hour of temptation so as to kill sin, what are we looking at? Here the key text is 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 where Paul talks about his own teaching as God-inspired words. This is the only other place in the New Testament where the very phrase "things of the Spirit" is used. He speaks of his revelations like this: ". . .which things we also speak, not in *words* taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit. . . . (14) But a natural man does not accept the *things of the Spirit* of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

So here "the things of the Spirit" are the words of God spoken by the apostles. From this I infer that when Romans 8:6 says that "those who are according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" he means that they set their minds on the words of God and the realities they stand for. These are the "things of the Spirit" that the natural person rejects and the spiritual person embraces. So to put to death the deeds of the body "by the Spirit" is to "set your mind on the things of the Spirit," which we now see means embracing

the words of God (and the reality they point to) spoken by his inspired spokesmen.

This is especially significant because the "word of God" is called "the sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians 6:17. And swords are used for killing. And that is what we are to do "by the Spirit" in Romans 8:13. Kill the deeds of the body by the Spirit, that is by fixing your mind on "the things of the Spirit," that is, by welcoming and embracing the "word of God" in your mind and heart, that is, by taking the Sword of the Spirit which is the deadly sword for sin-killing.

Step Three: By Hearing with Faith, not Works of the Law

Step #3. Very practically what do you do to bring the power of the Spirit by the word of God into vigorous, sin-killing action? The answer is clear in Galatians 3:5, "So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" The answer is that the Spirit is supplied to us for the miraculously mighty killing of sin not by works of the law but by "hearing with faith."

Why does he say "by *hearing* with faith" instead of just "by faith"? To emphasize that what faith hears and receives and embraces is something heard, namely, "the word of God," which is the sword of the Spirit, which kills sin.

How does it do that? Well, let's save that for a whole sermon when I come back. But we are not left helpless this morning. What we are saying is that when temptation comes, alongside a very powerful and resolute NO!, you look to a word from God, especially a word that promises he will *be* more for us and *do* more for us than what this sin promises. And if you believe him – there is the main battle – you will sever the root of sin.

So immerse your mind and heart in the fountain of truth and life and power – the promises of God, and when the temptation comes, take this all-satisfying word, this sword of the Spirit, and believe it, and by it sever the root of sin. Kill it. Piper How to Kill Sin part 2, Feb 17, 2002

Part Three

Three weeks ago I promised a third message on verse 13 about how to kill sin. "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." I get the words "kill sin" from this verse: "If you put to

death (=kill) the deeds of the body. . . ." So this verse says, If you want to live, you must kill. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

A Violence against Our Flesh

There is a mean streak in the Christian life. There is a violence. There is a militancy. But it is exactly the opposite of selfish violence against people. It is a violence against the "flesh" or against "the deeds of the body" – *our* flesh and *our* body. The Christian is not mean to others. He is mean to his own sinfulness – his own flesh.

We saw the meaning of "flesh" in Romans 8:7, "The mind that is set on the *flesh* is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." The flesh is what we are when rebellion against God and insubordination and hostility to God rule our bodies and our minds. So the way you put to death "the deeds of the body" is to strangle the air that sinful deeds breathe. Strangle the flesh. Cut the lifeline. Pinch the air pipe. Stop the blood flow. Sinful deeds must be killed before they happen – by severing the root of distrust and hostility and insubordination toward God.

"By the Spirit" and through the "Things of the Spirit"

So we asked, How do you do that? Paul says it is "by the Spirit." Verse 13b: "If *by the Spirit* you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Now what does that mean? This is a key to the Christian life. Putting to death the deeds of the body "by the Spirit." Killing sin "by the Spirit."

Now what is that? We argued that putting sin to death "by the Spirit" is probably related to what Romans 8:5 says about "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit." "Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." In other words, one way to kill sin "by the Spirit" is to "set your mind on the things of the Spirit."

So we asked, What are the "things of the Spirit." We answered from 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 which says this: "We speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit. . . . But a natural man does not accept the *things of the Spirit* of God, for they are foolishness to him." Here we have the very phrase of Romans 8:5, "things of the Spirit." What are they? The words of God, spoken by the apostles, taught by the Spirit, not human wisdom.

So to put to death the deeds of the body (as Romans 8:13 says) "by the Spirit" we must set our minds on "the things of the

Spirit," which we now see means: set your mind on the word of God in scripture. What makes this ring so true is the connection with Ephesians 6:17 where Paul says in our battle against evil we must "take the helmet of salvation, and *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*"

Among all the spiritual armor that we are to "put on" in our warfare there is only one offensive weapon that is used for killing. The sword. And what is it? It is described in two ways that link it with Romans 8:13. 1) It's the sword "*of the Spirit.*" So if we are to kill the deeds of the body "by the Spirit," and the one killing weapon in our armor is the sword and it is called "*the sword of the Spirit,*" we have good reason to think that the agent for killing sin "by the Spirit" is this sword. 2) And second, what is this "sword of the Spirit"? Ephesians 6:17 says it is "the word of God," which confirms our connection with 1 Corinthians 2:14. The sword that kills sin is the word of God. And the way we kill sin "by the Spirit" is to set our minds on "the things of the Spirit," that is, the word of God in Scripture, which becomes then the sword of the Spirit.

The Paradox of Who Is Doing the Work

So the question we are asking and trying to answer is: What can I do tonight to bring the power of the Holy Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action in my life? Because you see the paradox in Romans 8:13, don't you? On the one hand, killing sin is something Paul says you must do. *You*, must do it. "[*You*] put to death the deeds of the body." But on the other hand, it says, you do it "by the Spirit." Now the Spirit is not a tool or a weapon. He is a person. He is God. Put to death the deeds of the body by means of God, the Spirit. So, evidently, the Spirit is the decisive killer. That's the paradox: you do it; but you do it in such a way that it is he who does it. That is the difference between the Christian life and a moral self-help program. This is what Paul was saying in Romans 15:18, "I will not venture to speak of anything except what *Christ has accomplished through me.*" And what he was saying in 1 Corinthians 15:10b, "I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." I labored, but it was not I, but God's grace – God's Spirit – in me and with me.

So it is absolutely right that we are asking, What can I do tonight to bring the power of the Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action? If we are going to live the Christian life – not just an imitation of it –

we must experience Romans 8:13: We must put sin to death in a way that it is decisively the Spirit which puts it to death. The glory of God is at stake here. Because the ultimate sin-killer will get the greatest badge of honor. You or God.

By Works of Law or by Hearing with Faith?

So we ended last time by looking at the key text in Galatians 3:5. Here Paul answers the question, How do you bring the Spirit into vigorous sin-killing action? He asks, "Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" In other words, he is asking, How does the Holy Spirit flow with miracle-working power in our lives? How does He come into vigorous, sin-killing acting in our lives? He mentions two options: by works of law, or by hearing with faith. And the answer he expects is clearly: not by works of law, but by hearing with faith. Now why does he say "by *hearing* with faith" instead of just "by faith"? The Spirit comes and works mightily in our lives, killing sin, not just "by faith" but by "*hearing* with faith." Why does he say it that way? The answer is that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, and it's the word that you hear and believe. When the word of God – the Sword of the Spirit – is heard and believed, the Spirit is moving with vigorous, sin-killing action.

In other words, the connection between the Holy Spirit and you is the word of God and faith. They are like socket and plug. When the plug of your faith goes in the socket of God's Word, the Spirit is flowing. And when he flows, he kills sin.

Before I give you some practical illustrations how this works there are two important things to say.

We Kill Sin the Same Way We Get Saved

One is that you can see that we kill sin the same way we get saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Faith, not works, is the way we are made right with God; and faith, not works, is the way we engage the Holy Spirit to kill sin. So if you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, what you are hearing in this sermon is not some remote advanced form of Christian living way down the line of Christian maturity. This is how you become a Christian. And this is how you grow as a Christian.

To become a Christian you believe the promises of God: like, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:12). And to fight sin as a Christian, you believe the promises of God: like, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). When Christ died for us, he bought with his blood both justification and sanctification. And both are obtained by faith. That's one thing that needs to be said. You never outgrow your need to live by faith. We begin and end by trusting the gift of imputed righteousness and the power of God's grace to kill sin and impart practical righteousness.

The Glory of Christ Is at Stake in Living This Way

The second thing that needs to be said is that the glory of Christ is at stake in living this way. All of life is meant to make much of Jesus Christ. Everything we do should magnify his greatness. Now ask yourself: Why isn't the way to bring the power of the Spirit into vigorous, sin-killing action simply to pray for it to happen? Why not just ask God to kill the sin in your life? "Ask and you will receive" (Luke 11:9, 13).

Well, we should indeed ask. Prayer is crucial. But that is *not* the sum total of what "put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit" means. Paul says, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you does so by hearing with faith. Not just asking, but hearing. And not just hearing, but hearing with faith. Now, why does God design his triumphs in this way?

For this reason: if God simply killed sin when we ask him to without making our hearing and believing a part of the process, Jesus Christ would not get the glory for our holiness. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of Truth comes . . . he will glorify me" (John 16:13-14). The work of the Spirit, in killing our sin, is to do it in a way that gives glory to Jesus Christ. Now how can that happen? It happens because the Spirit only flows through "hearing with faith." And what we *hear* is, at root, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yes it includes all the promises of God. Because, as 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "All the promises of God find their Yes in him." In other words, Jesus paid for every promise for those who trust him. So every promise that you hear and believe, gives glory to Jesus Christ. If we merely pray and ask God to kill our sin, without hearing the gospel of Christ or any of its promises, Christ would not be honored by our holiness. And God means for his Son to be magnified

in justification and in sanctification. So he does not design sanctification to happen by prayer alone, but by hearing the Christ-exalting, blood-bought promises of God and believing them as we ask God to kill our sin.

That's the second thing that needs to be said. Killing sin in our lives must glorify Jesus. And Jesus is glorified when we kill sin by the Spirit, that is, by hearing and believing the promises that he bought and secured by his own blood.

Illustrations of How This Is Done

Now let me close with some illustrations. Right now three of our missionary families are being forced out of Tanzania within 30 days. One of the missionary wives compared their situation to the disciples after the death of Jesus and before the resurrection: "They are sitting quietly and numbly at someone's house . . . and they don't know about the resurrection that is to come. That's what this time feels like to us in many ways: darkness, and an unknown future. Out of the blue, we're packing up and leaving the country, our home for the last 7 years, the only home our children have known."

Now what are the dangers of sin here? What are the sins that need to be killed before they get the upper hand? Anger. Despair. Self-pity. Fear. Impatience and irritability. So how do you put to death those sins and the deeds of the body that might come from them? Here is the answer from that same email from the missionary wife: We are clinging to these truths: God is good, He is in control, He loves us more than we can comprehend, and He has plans to give us hope and future, plans to prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11). Our spirits are understandably low, we are emotionally and physically exhausted. BUT . . . "because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

In other words, they are putting to death the deeds of the body – they are killing sin – by the Spirit. They are hearing the promises of God and believing them. And by that means the Holy Spirit is flowing and sustaining and sanctifying.

Here's another illustration. A missionary couple was with us ministering among refugees here in the Cities until last year. Now they are headed with three small children to a country in Africa which is so sensitive they can't name it. Their February prayer letter was

one of the clearest examples of how to put sin to death by the Spirit that I have ever seen.

They listed the sins that were threatening them and then gave the promises of God that they were using to put the sins to death. "Whereas the Constitution of [this country] may state one thing, the Word of God says, "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Where fear says, "what if . . . happens?" faith says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

When worry surfaces, faith responds, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

When doubt and frustration scoff, "They'll never change, this is a waste of time!" Jesus looks us in the eye and responds, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27).

Learn from our missionaries. Learn from the apostle Paul. Put to death the deeds of the body *by the Spirit*. Not by the works of the law. Kill sin *by the Spirit*. Not by works of the law. Glorify Jesus Christ by taking the sword of the Spirit, the promises of God, purchased by his blood, and set your mind on them. Bank on them. Be satisfied by them. The power of sin will be broken. Sin will not have dominion over you. Jesus Christ will be magnified in your body! Amen.

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