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Dealing with Sin in your Life
Mark 9:43-48; Colossians 3:5-11

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Too many people today do not take seriously the problem of sin. We live in an interesting time, there are some 100,000,00 cases of COVID, 2,000,000 have died, we are told to take very seriously this virus but we do not take serious our sin. 100 Million people have the Coronavirus but 7 Billion people are infected with sin, 2 million people have died from this virus but every soul that sins will die. We don't take seriously the problem of sin. They will say that because Jesus is merciful and loving, because of his gospel grace, I need not take seriously the wickedness of this world and our hearts. Yet, it is these very same people who also miss Jesus teaching in the gospel of God's hatred towards sin, the hell that results from sin, and the duty of believers to mortify (kill) sins.

Church, let us be frank this morning, Jesus hates sin. It caused his death. It is the cause of pain and suffering in this world. Every time we witness death, every time we see injustice, we know that the root or source of all the things is sin. The original sin of Adam and Eve and even the sin within us.

Lesson: Paul instructs us in Colossians 3:5-11 that it is our duty as believers to mortify our sins.

Mortify means, as our pew Bible puts it to *put to death* or literally "to make dead". This is why we had two scripture readings this morning. Jesus teaches us in Mark 9 that to mortify the flesh is not to sprinkle a little grace upon our sins. Nor is it a sweeping of our wrongs under the rug. No, we are to violently, aggressively and fiercely be killing our sins each and every day of our lives.

This is graphic language. The reason that we speak of killing sin in this way is because sin seeks to kill you. "*For if you live according to the flesh, you will die*" (Rom. 8:13). It was John Owen who said, "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you".¹

Thus it is our duty to *put to death* the old man and clothe ourselves in the virtues of Christ, lest we die. Paul gives us three motivations as to why we should seek to mortify remaining sin;

1. *(We should mortify our sins because)* It Destroys us (vv.5-7).
2. *(We should mortify our sins because)* It Destroys our Relationships (vv.8-9a).
3. *(We should mortify our sins because)* It Honours God (vv.9b-11).

Point 1: *(We should mortify our sins because)* It Destroys us (vv.5-7).

There is no such thing as a perfect Christian. Indwelling sin will always abide with us while we are on earth (Phil. 3:12; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7; 8:13). No matter how good someone may look, act, or speak there are always more sins to kill.

1.1 - Christians must mortify

The first thing I want you to notice is the audience to whom Paul is speaking. In verse 5 Paul writes, "*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth*". He is speaking to Colossian Christians. To those who are risen with Christ (v.1); those who died with Christ (v.3); to those whose whole life is Christ and who would one day reign with him in glory (v.4). It is the same with Jesus' words in Mark 9. He speaks not to the crowds of people or the Pharisees but to his disciples. These are the men who saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain, who loved him, who he would die for, and they would reign with him in glory. Yet it is still their duty to kill indwelling sins. This teaching is for Christians.

Christians are those who are free from the condemning power of sin (1 Jn. 3:9), we are given a new nature (2 Cor. 5:17), the redeemed humanity, yet still we sin (HC 114) and therefore still we must mortify. Is there any among us free from sin? We have all sinned, we all know what I am talking about. Paul's teaching is not evangelistic but Apostolic. This teaching is for you and I. We must make it our daily work; always while we breathe; to be killing sin.

1.2 - Christians must mortify the Old Man

So what are we to mortify? Paul says the *earthly nature*. That is, the old man and his sinful ways. John Calvin says "The 'old man' means whatever we bring from our mother's womb, and whatever we are by nature".² Notice the words "*your members*". That word 'your' is possessive, meaning that this sinful, earthly nature is ours. We all have a sin nature. "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me*" (Ps. 51:5).

You see, there is a force of decay at work in every man. This decay, this law of sin (Rom. 8), this earthly nature needs to be shrunk, starved, it needs to be mortified. Every Christian gathered in this room knows what I am talking about. We have all, including

¹Owen, John. *Mortification of Sin*. pg. 27

²Calvin, John. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Galatians Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*. Pg. 349

myself, been shocked with the reality of remaining sin in us. Where we ask ourselves, “Did I really say that?”, “Why did I watch that?”, “Why did I do that?”. “*O wretched man that I am*” (Rom. 7:24). We all strive against sin, even as Christians today.

And Jesus in Mark 9 taught his disciples that this was a battle they will have for all the days of their lives, till their dying breath, fighting within themselves the law of sin.

This indwelling sin will not only be striving, rebelling and troubling to you in life; but if not dealt with by Christ, if not mortified, will bring forth greater, more cursed, soul destroying sins.

There is an insect called the Tarantula Hawk Wasp. This insect in order to further its species lays its egg in a spider. As the egg hatches within the spider and grows it begins to devour the spider's non essential organs, eventually killing the host in order that it may grow and live. Dear Christian, so it is with indwelling sin. It resides within us, wreaking havoc upon us, until we are destroyed from the inside out.

Look at what Paul says, the fruit of indwelling sin is “*fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (v.5). All sins that pertain to us as individuals.

- *Fornication* - Gratification of our **own** lusts.
- *Uncleanness*- Our **own** Unnatural lusts. Adultery, incest, rape, etc.,.
- *Passion (lust)*- When our **own** minds are taken with sexual thoughts.
- *Evil desires* - Wickedness of **our** heart. Hating the things of God.
- *Covetousness, which is idolatry* - Lacking contentment and desiring what others have rather than what God has given **you**.

All of these things Paul lists in verses 5-6 describe the sinner as he is in himself (as opposed to sinning against others). Everytime we do these things, indwelling sin is welling up. These sins don't point the blame at anyone but ourselves. Sin kills the host.

1.3 - Christians must mortify the Old Man because God is Angry with Sin

“*Because of these things the wrath of God is coming*” (v.6).

Dear friends, there are so many today who want an easy Christian life. We don't want to fight against sin, it would be easier just to look the other way. No, Jesus says, “*if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. For it is better for you to enter life maimed than to go with two hands to hell.*”

God hates sin. God hates sin so much that he put Jesus on the cross to die for sins that he would not be in the presence of sin (Hab. 1:13). Sin is the corruption of God's good work, and is the rejection of his morals and the embracing of the morals of Satan. And sin is not becoming of a believer.

“*in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*” (v.7).

What this text means is that a believers life is not to be characterized by those things the wrath of God is against (Rom. 1:18-32). Rather, our lives are to be characterized by Christ and his virtues (3:12-17).

Application:

1. The Christian life is not easy. - mortification is hard work!
2. Cut off that which causes you to sin.

Point 2: (*We should mortify our sins because*) It Destroys our Relationships (vv.8-9a).

Secondly, we are called to put to death our indwelling sins because it destroys our relationships. “*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth*” (v8).

Of course you remember from the Old Testament the most sorry and despised person in the Jewish OT society was the leper (Lk. 17:12-15). Leprosy is a flesh eating disease that destroys the flesh and the nervous system of the host. The whole body would be destroyed by this disease. So much so, they would wrap clothes tightly around them to hold themselves together.

It's secondary effect was that the leper was an outcast of society. The reason for this is not because of the grotesque nature of the disease but because they would make anyone unclean they came into contact (Num. 5:2).

So it is with sin, dear Christian (Isa. 1:5-6; Ps. 38:5-7). Sin destroys us, if not mortified, but it also contaminates our loved ones, friends and family. Abraham Kuyper said, “*Therefore humanity falls apart through sin, in a multiplicity of separate peoples; when sin, in the bosom of these nations, separates men and tears them apart*”.³ And Paul having identified the sinful deeds of the body now turns to the invisible sins that harm those around us.

2.1 - Invisible sins also to be mortified

Notice that Paul's second list of sins are not tangible. They are invisible and typically they are the sins that we don't consider as bad as the other list. Yet Paul says these sins too are to be put to death, or executed, if you will.

- *Anger, rage, malice* - The appetite for revenge. Hatred in the heart for someone made in the image of God.

³Kuyper, Abraham, *Lectures on Calvinism*. Pg. 81.

- *Slander and Filthy language* - That is, speaking words of gossip, defamation, speaking evil about someone. As well as cursing.
- *Lying* - Augustine defines lying as “*It is the voluntary setting forth of what is false with the intention of deceiving*”.

Notice that these sins are invisible; these are also the sins that occur to the detriment of our neighbours. *Anger, slander, and lying* harm our fellow man. So then not only does our sin kill us, but like a virus the more people it touches the farther it spreads.

Often when we sin, swearing, drunkenness, lust, etc.,. We think that it will only affect me, yet we know that this is not the case. Sin begets more sin, not only in us but in others. The more we sin the more it spreads to our spouses, children, friends, etc.,.

Application:

1. When I worked at the soup kitchen in Toronto a man came in after we were closed. He had been beaten badly. I was able to clean him up, getting him a change of clothes and some food. He confided in me that he was addicted to methamphetamine. He said to me, “Jacob, drugs have ruined my life. My children hate me, the government won’t let me see them, and if I can’t quit this drug it will kill me.” A profound confession. Our sin might not be an addiction to methamphetamine but the result will be the same. It affects all of our lives and kills the soul.

So how, and why, do we mortify our sins?

Point 3: (*We should mortify our sins because*) It Honours God (vv.9b-11).

It is God’s will for the church that they not only be saved by Christ but progress in holiness on earth (Jn. 17:17; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:16). So how do we mortify the flesh? Joel Beeke says, God has given us two ways to put sin to death;

1. Look to Jesus by faith.
2. Repent.

This is the two edged sword that kills sin.

3.1 - *Put off sins. (Turn from your sins)*

“*But now you yourselves are to put off all these*” (v.8-9).

But how are we to stop the spread of the most vicious of diseases? Again, we turn to the two tools that God has given us to mortify our flesh. First, we must *turn or repent* from our sins. The imagery that Paul uses here is the imagery of a garment. When we become Christians we are to throw out our old ways like someone throws out an old worn out coat “*since you have taken off your old self*”.

We see this same idea in Acts 7:58 in the stoning of Steven as the crowd took off their coats and laid them at Saul’s feet. So we must take off and lay down our old nature. We must turn from our wicked ways every day. We must discipline the flesh, every day. Repenting each time we fall. Being numbered with the righteous publican who cries out “*God me merciful to me a sinner*”.

We must first turn from our sins. Don’t get comfortable with sin. Though our world cries out, *peace, peace* with sexual sin, with lying, with impurity, with intoxication, with pride but there is no peace with sin. Sin seeks to destroy you, so run from it.

3.2 - *Put on Jesus (Believe in the Lord)*

“*and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (v.10).

The second way that we put to death our sinful ways is in believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. What this means, dear believer is that God, the *creator*, is the source, or the fountainhead of our mortification. Simply put, it is the Spirit of God Almighty who is the author of this work and apart from him you will never defeat your sins.

So the question becomes how does the Spirit mortify our sins? John Owen, in his seminal work *The Mortification of Sin* outlines the three ways the Spirit mortifies sin in believers.

By Causing our Hearts to Abound in Grace

- 1) You see, it is not enough to empty our hearts of our sinful ways but our hearts must also then be filled with righteousness. So the Spirit rains grace upon our hearts so that they may flower into the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-20). We must be renewed by the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5). Thereby we walk no longer by the flesh, but by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).
 - a) Seek more godly things that increase the grace of the Spirit. When we struggle with sin, devote more time to fasting, prayer, meditation, that point us to the saviour.

Weakening The Root

- 2) Second, the Spirit works in us a real habitual weakening of indwelling sins. Day by day the Holy Spirit chops at the tree of our sinfulness. Often, it does not fall in one single fell swoop, but takes years to fell the tree and burn the roots.
 - a) When you sin, get up again and keep fighting.
 - b) Don’t lose heart. Sanctification is not a one time event but a daily work.

Communion with God

- 3) The most effective tool in fighting sin is communion with the Lord. Our Lord Jesus was tempted in every way as we were yet he did not fall into sin because of his daily relationship with God.
- a) Make communion with God your daily priority. Daily devotions? Family worship? Pray often for the sins that entangle you.

We see then that the double edged sword of Almighty God that mortifies us is the turning and believing. Every book of the Bible speaks in this manner. Repent and believe. Sounds simple, it's almost too easy! Yet, it is what we must toil with sin all the days of your life. Verse 11, "*which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*" *Day by day* we are being renewed (2 Cor. 4:16), in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

One final comment, if you don't know Jesus so will never be free of sin. It's in the *knowledge* of Christ that gives us the strength to kill sin. You see, the more we know him, the more we know of his purposes of grace, the more we trust and love him and desire to be like him. "*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus* (Heb. 12:1,2). It is he who frees us not only from the power of sins, but also the desire to sin and he loves to set sinners free.

Conclusion:

Congregation, we must realize the deadliness of sin. Heed the warning of the Saviour, it is better to kill your sins on earth than to atone for them in hell. Yet, God has not left us without tools! Turn from your sins and run to Jesus Christ. Let the Spirit work in your heart filling it with the virtues of Christ. And for those who are struggling with sin right now, be comforted to know that mortification is a work of the Spirit and *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion* (Phil. 1:6). He works in us *to will and to do of his own good pleasure* (Isa. 26:12). It is the Spirit's work in us, yet God still makes it our duty, each and every day, to be killing sin.

Prayer of Application:

O Lord,

Bend our hands and cut them off, for we have often struck thee with our wayward wills, when our fingers should have embraced thee by faith. Give us a view to a discovered sinfulness, to know that though our sins are crucified they are never fully mortified. So often sins rise again in our sinful hearts.

- O my crucified but never fully mortified sinfulness!
- O my life-long damage and daily shame!
- O my indwelling and besetting sins!
- O the tormenting slavery of a sinful heart!

Destroy, o God, the sinful ways of our flesh that make life a hell. Point us to the cross that meets our every need. Refresh our minds to heaven and the great grace that saved a wretch such as me. Thy grace alone can subdue the rising sin within: give us more of it. Amen.