

Good morning, church. I am grateful for the opportunity to read and expound God's Word to you today. As always, I am reminded of the simultaneous joy and burden of the task that lies before me...as such, your prayers this week are appreciated.

When you are indoctrinated into the military, you spend a great deal of time hearing, reading and memorizing information. One such piece of information that has been a military standard for decades is the Code of Conduct for Military Members of the United States. The code is an ethics guide and a Department of Defense directive that states how military members should conduct themselves if captured during a wartime situation. I will read part of this code to you now: **"I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I will never surrender of my own free will. If I am captured, I will continue to resist by all means available."** You see, the idea here is not necessarily victory so much as the refusal to surrender.

That having been said, I submit to you that the Christian life is one of war, one in which we as Christians cannot afford to surrender. As God's people, we are at war with our culture, with the world and as the Scripture states, the forces of darkness. When we Christians consider the enemies of holiness and personal piety, we often only think of those that I just described.

However...I submit to you that there is a more subtle yet heinous enemy facing each individual Christian, one against whom we rarely battle...and that enemy is self. In other words...the biggest obstacle to Kevin Lum's sanctification and spiritual growth is Kevin Lum. The apostle Paul described his own battle against self in Romans 7:15 when he said **"For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."**

No doubt each one of us has at least one sin with which we struggle mightily. (If we were honest with ourselves, there are probably more.) That sin might be lust, gluttony or gossip...that sin may be a bad temper...or the idolatry of sports. No matter what sins we battle as Christians, our human nature has a tendency to complain and gripe about the struggle, even to the point of having a pity party. As to that, John Piper simply says: **"Don't just bellyache about your failures. Make war!"**

If you are in the military and want to learn how to do something, there is always a manual for you to read. We Christians have our own manual...the Bible. God's Word provides a guide in the battle against self, and it is to that guide to which we turn today.

(If you have your copy of God's Word with you, I invite you to turn to Romans Ch 8, verse 11.)

(Read Romans 8:11-13, NASB)

For the purposes of clarity, I will also read the King James version of verse 13 which says **"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."** To mortify means to subdue by self - denial or to remove gangrenous flesh. Today we are going to see what Scripture says about battling the flesh through the mortification of sin. First, let us consider the **Graceful Gift of the Spirit.**

Of course, when we talk about the Spirit in this context, we are discussing the Holy Spirit...the helper that Jesus promised to the disciples in John 14...the third person of the Triune Godhead...and as Trinitarian Christians, we believe that the **Holy Spirit IS GOD.** We have received a gift from the Holy Spirit...that gift is salvation from God's wrath against sin, adoption into God's family and the inheritance of eternal life. **"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.**

³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

That was a somewhat lengthy supporting text, but I love it because it's a beautiful picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Quite simply, Paul is saying you (speaking to Christians) were dead in your sins. Spiritually dead, haters of God, unable and unwilling to do anything to please God. Deserving of condemnation, having earned the

wages of God's eternal wrath for the wicked works of evil in breaking His moral laws. At some point in each Christian's life, God initiated the process of regenerating our hearts and causing us to be justified (or righteous) before God the Father. This regeneration and salvation was accomplished through Jesus defeating death and sin upon the cross, having lived a life of perfect holiness and obedience. In doing so, God gave us new life in Jesus Christ, one that includes the ever-present guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 11 again: **"He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** There are two aspects to this new life given to God's people: eternal life and eternal purpose.

Let's consider the aspect of eternal life. John 3: 36 says **"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."** We children of God, we Christians... we have the blessed hope and understanding that when our bodies fail, our spirit (or soul if you will) is going to spend eternity with God. What will that eternity look like? Revelation 21 and 22 give us some idea. AFTER JUDGEMENT... it appears there will be a new Heaven and a New Earth. It will be more beautiful than we can imagine, beyond the scope of human understanding. The city of New Jerusalem will be more beautiful than the rarest, most precious metals and stones. There will be no sickness, pain, death or sorrow. There will be no darkness even, as the light of God's Holiness will shine forth onto the entirety of His new creation. We will be completely free from temptation and the power of sin as we give praise to God forever.

This is normally what comes to mind when we think of eternal life in Christ. But eternal life after the end of time is not the only aspect of new life in Christ... let's also consider that we are given eternal purpose. Romans 11: 36 sheds some light on this: **"For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."** From this verse (as well as others) we conclude that the ultimate purpose of ALL EXISTENCE is to give glory to God and His kingdom.

That having been said... what's the difference in how Christians and non-Christians glorify God? The difference is that we as God's chosen people truly have a desire to give Him glory. When you came to faith in Jesus Christ, your affections changed... you were given a new disposition, different inclinations. The attractions of the world began to lose their luster, fading as they were outshined by the glory of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. You find your old sentiments... anger, lust, gluttony, rebellion... replaced by patience, purity, contentment and obedience as what important to God becomes important to you. Think about it this way... humans only truly live after they die to self and begin to live for Christ.

This begs the question: what brings about such change? **The answer is the Holy Spirit.** Think about this: The unregenerate man may know that the judgement of God is coming, he may have an intellectual awareness of his need for a savior, but it brings no permanent change of heart. Why is that? John Calvin has the answer. He wrote that the Holy Spirit **"...is the internal teacher, by whose agency the promise of salvation, which would otherwise only strike the air on our ears, penetrates to our hearts."** In other words, it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that hearts are changed. Furthermore, it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that we even become aware of our need for a Savior.

The Holy Spirit doesn't just regenerate us, save us then leave us alone... and praise God for that. Consider the Apostles... they walked with the Lord for three years and yet when was hanging on the Cross, only one of them could be found: John. Yet less than 2 months later the day of Pentecost, we see a change... after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were bold in their witness, preaching the Gospel of Jesus on the streets and at the temple. **For our purposes today, consider that the King James Version of verse 11 says that the Holy Spirit "quickens" us.** That "quickening" is the bold empowerment of the Spirit, not only giving us the ability but the desire to mortify sin.

We have considered the Gracious gift of the Spirit, now let us examine the Obligation for Believers. Look at verse 12 again... Paul writes that his brethren are not under obligation to the flesh. **What do you think that means?** Think about what Romans 8:1 says: **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Couple Romans 8:1 with Romans 8:12... in one sense, it means that we children of God, those who have been adopted into His family, are not obligated to pay the eternal penalty for our fleshly crimes. It means that we will not experience God's wrath against our wickedness... why? Because Jesus Christ paid that penalty upon the cross... **AMEN?** In this, Christians are set free from the punishment for sin.

In another sense, it means that we Christians are not slaves to our fleshly desires. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 6:6 “Knowing this, that 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.” In other words, when Jesus was crucified upon the cross, the sins of the elect...the bride of Christ...the church... were crucified as well. NOT JUST SOME OF OUR EVIL, NOT JUST PART OF OUR WICKEDNESS. The text in Romans 6 says “our body of sin” has been done away with. This means that if you are a child of God here today, your guilt for EVERY SIN that you’ve ever committed in the past or will commit in the future has been rendered null and void. The result of our sin’s crucifixion is that OUR SINFUL NATURES ARE DEAD! In the death of our sinful natures, Christians are set free from the power of sin.

Let me ask you something...how much power does Buddha have over you? Or Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons? What about Charles Taze Russell, the founder of Jehovah’s Witnesses? They don’t have ANY power over you because they are DEAD. The same applies to your sinful nature...I can see the wheels turning in your minds right now. “Wait a minute, Kevin. If my sin has no power over me, why do I keep choosing to engage in wickedness?” The answer isn’t pretty...listen to **Proverbs 26:11**. “**Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats folly.**” Even though our sin is dead, the memory of that sin remains...and it TEMPTS US! Listen, the only power that your sinful nature has over you is the power that you give it.

That having been said, if you are struggling against the alluring power of the sinful habits of your past, let me encourage you a bit: you are NOT alone. I believe all too often, we believe that as Christians, we should be sinless, perfect and free from all temptation. We hear stories of people who come to faith in Christ and report being miraculously healed from all their heinously sinful addictions...and then we wonder why we ourselves are not free. Listen to these words penned by Puritan author Richard Sibbes: “**So we see that grace does not away with corruption all at once, but some is left for believers to fight with.**” Dear brother and sisters in Christ...your personal struggle against your own sin is God ordained and God glorifying.

Moving on, we Christians may have no obligation to our sinful flesh, but we DO have an obligation to constantly wage war against the evil desires of our old nature. To whom are we obligated? The Holy Spirit? Why are we obligated to do this? For several reasons...first, because we are commanded to do so. Titus 2:12-13 advises us to (and I paraphrase) turn away from the old passions of the flesh and to live self-controlled, upright and Godly lives. Secondly, we are obligated to the Spirit (God) because of what He’s done for us... as well as WHO HE IS. Before time began, the perfectly Holy God the Father decreed that a people would be set apart for Himself, God the Son (Jesus) paid for the regeneration and salvation of that people with his obedience and in due time, God the Spirit illuminated the need for the Savior and gave that people new life. As God’s chosen people, each one of us should understand that engaging in the battle against our flesh for His glory is one of our prime directives and highest privileges. John Owen (a Puritan author whose works I highly recommend) reminds us that this mandate belongs to every Christian when he wrote that “**I shall discharge him from this duty, who can bring sin to a composition, to a cessation of arms in this warfare.**”

We have established via Scripture that all Christians are charged to mortify sin; however, that begs the question: “How exactly are we supposed to mortify sin?” First, we employ the protection of God’s word. Psalm 119:9 tells us to guard the purity of our faith walk by guarding it according to the Word of God. As a church, we hold to the principle of Sola Scriptura...meaning that the Bible is the final authority for Christian faith and practice. The Bible contains *everything* that God has decreed His people need to know in order to properly worship and glorify His name. That having been said, in order to know how to guard our way in purity, we must be systematically reading and studying our Bibles.

Secondly, we mortify sin by remaining prayerfully vigilant. Proverbs 7:7-9 tells of a young man who fell prey to the seductions of an adulteress. The way that the vignette reads, the young man KNEW where to find the adulteress and INTENTIONALLY sought her out. He wasn’t forced to go the street where she lived...he CHOSE to do so. He easily could have continued on his way, completely bypassing the temptation of the adulterous woman. How does this apply to the battle against sin? If you KNOW that you struggle with an impure mind, don’t watch sensual television programs or movies. If gossip is your enemy, stay away from those coworkers who do nothing but gossip. If you have a propensity to rebel, try submitting Biblically to those authorities that God has placed over you. Remain vigilant, but do so prayerfully, asking God to give you

wisdom and discernment to recognize the signs on the road to wickedness.

Thirdly, give sin no quarter. Don't think to yourself that you can sin just this once and repent later...of normally, sin has a snowball effect that eventually leads to an avalanche. For instance, if you struggle with the temptation to lust...keep your eyes to yourself and don't play with fire Think about how King David's lust caused him to commit adultery, lie and eventually...murder. Matthew 5:29-30 says (and I paraphrase) that if your eye or your hand causes you to sin, remove them. Learn how to be VIOLENT, but do so against your own sin. Take the fight to the enemy and never stop attacking your sin, never surrender, never give up. John Owen said it better than I when he wrote: **"Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you."**

We've pondered **the Gracious Gift of the Spirit and the Obligation of the Believer...now, let's consider the consequences for scoffers.** Verse 13 says **"If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."** First, know that "life" is the result of the Christian's Holy Spirit-empowered obedience in the battle against their sin. Earlier we discovered that the Holy Spirit has given us new life in Christ...both eternal life and eternal purpose. Our lives in Christ are greatly enriched when we experience victory over sin. We experience more joy in our personal walk with Christ, corporate worship becomes more meaningful and each victory builds upon the one that came before it. Of course, NONE of this is done by the power of the human will...rather, verse 11 says that we are quickened (or empowered) to victory in this work by the Holy Spirit. Also remember that this work of mortification is expected of every Christian, as evidenced by our Lord and Savior when He said in Luke 9:23 that "...If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." We've been conscripted...drafted if you will. To fight against sin is to live; however, to give up, lay down arms or surrender surely means certain death.

If life is the result of the death of sin...what happens when sin is not mortified? The answer is also found in verse 13: **"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die."** In other words, death is the result of allowing sin to live. There are two aspects to this death: for the Christian and non-Christian. First, let's consider what happens when a Christian neglects the battle against sin. Don't be fooled; even God's children can stop fighting their sin for a season...and just like the texts makes note, death can occur. Of course, this is not talking about spiritual death. In John 10, Jesus Himself stated that once He'd given eternal life to one of God's children, nothing could take that eternal life away. No, the Christian who gives up the fight against their sin can expect to experience death in different ways. At minimum, they can expect to encounter the death of their salvation assurance. Richard Sibbes wrote that **"We must know that willful breaches in sanctification will much hinder the sense of our justification."** In other words, a Christian engaging in willful disobedience cannot expect to of their salvation. Sin that is not mortified grows worse over time eventually, relationships can die, ministries can die and most tragically...a person's personal witness for Christ can die. For example: No doubt we can all think of a high-profile Christian whose choices led to them experiencing a moral failure. While God certainly offers healing and forgiving grace to His Children...sometimes the consequences of our sin leads to irreparable change.

We briefly considered the consequences for the child of God that foregoes the fight against sin...even if it's for only a brief season. Before we close, let's think about what it means when a non-Christian doesn't take the battle to their sin. In verse 13 we learned that in order to experience success in the mortification of sin, the battle must be taken to the enemy in the power of the Holy Spirit...but wait...the unregenerate man or woman doesn't have the Holy Spirit. A person who does not have the Holy Spirit has had no change of heart, has not been given new desires that align with God's revealed will in Scripture. Everyone who is not a child of God is a child of the flesh (of Satan, truthfully) and are dead in their trespasses and sins, living only to fulfill their prideful, fleshly desires. Albert Barnes was a 19th century Presbyterian minister and theologian whose Biblical commentaries I commend to you. He wrote that **"If you live to indulge your carnal propensities, you will sink to eternal death."** In other words, the unregenerate man or woman can expect to experience God's wrath for an eternity, due to their refusal to worship and obey the One True God in Spirit and Truth. Ephesians 4:18 makes it abundantly clear: "Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of their ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart."

In closing, I want to ask you: what about you? For the Christian brother and sister...are you taking the battle to

your sin on a daily, hourly or even minute by minute basis? If not, have you noticed death in your faith walk... death of assurance of your salvation? Or maybe for the friend who may be in attendance that is not a follower of Christ but has had their heart pricked by the reading of Scripture, will you respond by crying out to Jesus? However God is spoken to you today, we want to offer you a few moments for quiet reflection before we pray and raise our voices in the last song of our worship service today.

(Prayer)

(Final Hymn)

Community Group Questions

- How are Christians at war today? With whom are they battling? Who or what is the greatest enemy of the individual child of God?
- Discuss the two aspects of new life in Christ: eternal life (in heaven) and eternal purpose. (Here on earth.)
- What does it mean to mortify sin?
- What does Romans 6:6 mean when it says that "...our old self was crucified with Him?" How does that affect our daily faith walk?
- Which tactic for mortifying your own sin did you find to be the most promising? Discuss why.
- In his book called "The Mortification of Sin", Puritan author John Owen wrote: "Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the following quote from Puritan author Richard Sibbes: "We must know that willful breaches in sanctification will much hinder the sense of our justification?"