

Romans 8:13 – Putting sin to death (“mortification”)

This sermon is about the Christian life, and about putting sin to death. This verse (Romans 8:13) describes two different roads: a road of life and a road of death. It tells us that putting sin to death is essential. Which road are you really on?

1. Why? Because otherwise you will die

In Romans chapter 8, Paul is showing us that Christians are very different. They are not condemned by God's law, because they have changed. Christ died for their sins, and sent his Spirit to make them new people who could live a new way. Verses 5-8 describe the old way. An unsaved person does not love God's law. His mind is against it. He desires to please himself, and therefore he disobeys God's law and receives eternal death. Verses 9-11 tells us why Christians are different. The Holy Spirit lives in them. They love God's law, and the Spirit gives them power to obey it. They are heading for eternal life, even though their bodies are dying. But they are in a fight. Old, sinful desires are still there. They owe nothing to the old way (v12); that way leads to hell. They must live the new way, by putting sin to death (Matthew 5:17-20, Hebrews 12:14, Revelation 21:8). What is living in you, and where are you going to?

2. What it means, and what it does not mean

This is not “putting the *body* to death”. It does not mean being severe with our normal appetites – denying ourselves food, sleep or marriage as if they were evil. It is right to *control* our appetites (e.g. Proverbs 6:10), but trying to *kill* them is un-human and has no effect or power against remaining sin (Colossians 2:20-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-4). Marriage, food and sleep are not sins, so depriving ourselves of them is not killing sin. Rather, sin is what is forbidden in God's law (1 John 3:4). Our duty is to search our hearts and lives, and compare them with God's commands. When we find disobedience, we must seek to put it to death. For this, we must be careful and thorough. If you have a deadly enemy who wants to kill you, you cannot be careless. It is war, not a game! Sin will not give up until either you die, or it dies. If you are facing temptation, you must take serious action. Many fall into sin because they play with it instead of killing it. They are not serious. What is leading you into sin? Take radical action: kill it!

3. How to do it: By the Spirit of God

The Spirit of God is the one who dwells in us and gives us power to put sin to death. But how do we make use of his dwelling? It is not by doing nothing; “let go and let God” is not Christian teaching. We make use of the Spirit in definite ways. Firstly, the Spirit gave us the Word; he inspired us. We must be filled with the Word (Psalm 119:11). The Spirit reveals Jesus Christ to us (John 16:14-15). He stirs us up to remember Jesus, to remember the cross and resurrection and to repent and believe. Do that often! He is the Spirit of song and of thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:18-20). He is the Spirit of prayer (Romans 8:16). So you see, it is an every-day using of Christian privileges. It is every-day self-discipline in fighting sin through believing the gospel of Christ. True happiness is in holiness!