

Our study of the incomparable eighth chapter of Romans brings us to verse 12 and 13. Before we go into an exposition of this scripture, one very important thing we must keep in mind. When you accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord, you died to sin with him. You also rose to newness of life in his resurrection. When Christ died, you died; when Christ arose from the dead, you arose. The believer participates in all the victories of the Savior. It is a glorious thing. But this victory which has been purchased for you and me by Christ is ours only if we appropriate it daily. It is within our reach. It is within the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us to give us a victorious, joyous Christian life. To make the victory of Christ ours ^{is} in the first work of the Holy Spirit beyond regeneration and the new birth. That is what Paul is speaking of in our text and we need to look closely at what he is saying.

Paul says in verse 12, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh." You and I owe nothing to the flesh unless we are going to reward our murderer. Unless we would put on a pedestal that which would destroy us and drag us down, we should not bow before the flesh or its power. We are not in debt to the flesh. We should quit pampering it. We should quit saying "yes" to it. It is the destroyer of all spiritual life and all joy. But then in verse 13 he says, "If ye live, (if you habitually live) after the flesh, ye shall die." Paul teaches that living in the flesh kills a man in the present and results in eternal death. The world today is living for money and pleasure, but it is headed for death. The whole world in which we live is about to die. "If you habitually live after the flesh," Paul says, "you are about to die." That is what the Greek text says. You are about to die - you are not completely dead, but it will not be long until you are eternally dead and apart from God. But then he says, "But if ye, by the Spirit, (by the Holy Spirit) do cause to be put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." I cannot conceive of a more important text in all scripture for the Christian because it tells us how we triumph over evil and over sin and how we enter into life -- the full reality of eternal life which Christ has made possible for us in his death,

burial, and resurrection. Based upon the text there are three questions I want to raise and answer.

I. First of all, what is it that the apostle commands that we put to death? The text plainly says that it is the "deeds of the body." Paul does not say to kill the body. God has no quarrel with the body. He calls it the temple of the Holy Spirit, and declares a man who defiles the body, will be punished severely. But he is speaking about the DEEDS of the body. What are the deeds of the body? The deeds of the body are the practices or the acts (sinful acts) which man carries on through his body. They are what we would generally call sin which is performed within the realm of the body. They are the works of the flesh, mentioned in Galatians 5:19-20. Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, etc. etc." Then Paul goes on to say, "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." A man who habitually lives in these things is not a saved person, according to the scripture. He is headed for eternal death apart from God. This is the teaching of the entire New Testament. Paul says these things must be put to death in the believer's life. They must be crucified.

You will notice that in this list of sins there is every imagineable sin mentioned. It would cover the habits of life, it would cover the words of life, it would even cover the thoughts of life. Somebody would say, "I am not guilty of any of this. I do not need to die, I am all right." Wait a minute! In the light of the sermon on the mount, hatred in the heart is murder. Lust in the soul is adultery. There is not a person who must not die in order to live. There are deeds in your body which must be killed, and must be brought to the cross. This is absolutely necessary. Paul says that if we would live, we must cause to be put to death the deeds, acts, and practices of the body.

II. But there is a second question that arises out of the text. How are we to put to death the deeds of the body? Church history is the story of how

noble men have tried to deal with sin in the body. Some have tried to deal with it by isolating themselves from the work, like St. Jerome. He lived in a cave outside Jerusalem for many, many years, but testified that he did not get away from sin out there. Some have tried to deal with it by rigid religious discipline, like Martin Luther. He testified that he was surrounded and overwhelmed by his own sin. Others have thought they could do it by their orthodox belief. That will not do it. Your prayer will not do it. Your devotion will not do it. Men tend to try to conquer the flesh through the power of the flesh. Paul says that we must die to sin in the body. He calls on us to experience crucifixion - nothing less. This means that you and I cannot do it alone. It is impossible, because if you are crucified, somebody else has to do it. You can commit suicide in various ways, but you cannot commit suicide by crucifixion. Somebody has to nail you to the cross. This is true physically but it is equally true spiritually. Paul says the believer must undergo a day by day, habitual death, a crucifixion. He tells us the instrument or the executioner. He says it is by the Holy Spirit.

Who has the Holy Spirit? If you are a Christian, you have Him. He is in your body -- God dwelling in your mortal body and He has not come there to be passive, but to work out the work of God in your life. He has come to bring to fruition the wonderful fruit of the cross and of the resurrection in your life. Paul says if you habitually live after the flesh you shall die, "but if you by the Holy Spirit cause to be put to death the acts and practices of this body you shall live." You will notice that he says, "It is by the Holy Spirit." It is by God's power in the life of the Christian that enables him to overcome. But there is more to it than that. We must respond intelligently to the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have to understand His ministry, which is the reason the preacher must preach this truth or leave people in darkness and bondage. Paul says, "By this Holy Spirit we do cause to be put to death." We cannot do it. I cannot do it. No one can do it. But we can cause the Holy Spirit to do it, Paul says. How do we cause the Holy Spirit to do it? We certainly do not coerce Him. We are dealing with sovereign God. How does the Holy Spirit put to death the deeds of the body? We have to recognize the

problem first. We have to see our defeat apart from the Holy Spirit. We must have a sincere desire within our heart to live for Christ and to turn our back on sin, the world, and the things which destroy us. We must relinquish those things that rob us of Christian testimony and victory. This means giving the Holy Spirit permission to put to death the deeds of the body - the acts and practices which kill man and rob him of all spiritual life.

You are just as near Christ as you want to be. You can have just as much spiritual power today as you desire. If you are everlastingly making provision for the flesh, no wonder you are dead. You must make provision for the Holy Spirit to work in your life and to eradicate from your life those things which are displeasing to God, and which separate you from God until you cannot even pray or read the Bible. You have missed the whole point of the Christian life unless you realize that you can live the Christian life only in the power of the Holy Spirit and only through Christ living His life through you.

Some years ago I had a little growth on my lip. I thought I would eventually be able to get rid of it. I did everything I knew, but I could not get rid of that growth. I finally went to the doctor who looked at it and said to me, "Do you want that thing?" I said, "No, I do not want it." He asked, "Will you give me permission to take that growth off?" I replied, "Yes." So the doctor removed the growth from my lip. It is gone. He killed it, as it were. If I had not given him permission, he could not have removed it. I could not remove it, but I gave him permission. You and I as Christians cannot deal with the problem of sin. I have seen people come down the aisles in rededication (and thank God for everyone who comes) but I have seen ^{many} more frustrated people taking a stand, making New Year's resolutions and all kinds of resolutions, and who have, in a week or two, found themselves in the valley of despair and defeat and have cried out, "What can I do with self and with sin?"

Do you have a problem with your tongue - you have prayed about it, but you are still gossiping? Do you have a problem with jealousy? You have been concerned about it, you came

down the aisle one day when the evangelist preached and you meant with all your heart that you were going to do something about jealousy in your soul, but you did not. Why? You were looking to yourself and to your noble resolutions. Paul is telling us in Romans 8 that we are to submit ourselves to the indwelling Holy Spirit and to turn over to Him the problems which are too great for us, and let Him take them to the cross to remove them from our lives that we might live in Christ. As long as we hug to them and defend them, the Holy Spirit will never deal with them. You must bring them out in the open, turn them over to Him and be disgusted with them. Then it is that He does the work which you cannot do. He is the executioner.

III. But there is a final thing in our text. What is the result of all this? When we hear the word "death" we shrink from it. The preacher can come to the pulpit and preach an "easy believism," the glories of grace and of forgiveness and ~~people~~ people will say, "That is wonderful." But there is more to the gospel than that. If we do not get deeper in the gospel in the twentieth century than that, the world will mock us. Our young people are not going to buy it. They are better educated. They have heard men say, "You believe on Christ, join our church and all your problems are over." That is the greatest falsehood ever to be perpetrated on intelligent humanity. The victory of Christ must be appropriated every day through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

What are the results of the death process that is to go on in our lives? "If ye by the Holy Spirit do cause to be put to death the deeds of the body ye shall live." The end is not death. The end is life. When we recognize what is good for us, will we go in the other direction? Will we continue in that which will destroy us, our nation and our world? The death process is sweet when we understand that it is through death that we come into joy, power, victory and testimony in our experience with Christ. It is through death, spiritual death, letting the Holy Spirit do the work of crucifixion in our life, that we come into the full realities of eternal life.

Most people think eternal life is static. They are eager to receive it, but they are not eager to live it out. Eternal life is not static. It begins as new life and it develops degree by degree as we submit to the sovereign work of God's Spirit in our hearts. What is wrong with a man who was converted 30 years ago and has not grown one bit? What is wrong with the individual who accepted Christ as a child and today lives unhappily? What is wrong with the great crowd of church members who sincerely joined the church on profession of faith but do not even attend church today? Is it Christ? Is the gospel insufficient? I am saying to you that it is not. I am declaring to you that if we believe this scripture that we shall grow in His grace and in His power, and Christ shall become more real and sweeter every day. Thousands of people have sincerely made commitments to Christ, but they have not understood the Christian life beyond that point. They have been left with themselves and with their sins and frustrations, doubts, and sorrows. They have left the church by the thousands in our day. The answer for the church today is the gospel - all the gospel - preached and lived by God's people.

Paul says, "Ye shall live." I thought you were living when you were born again. Life begins at that point, but life never stands still. Spiritual life can no more stand still than your physical life. If your spiritual life is standing still, you are dying.

I can illustrate this great truth about the degree of spiritual life by the ^{stages}degrees of physical development. Take a week-old baby. He is alive. We who have several children can testify to that. He will eat and he will gaze at the new world into which he is born. He is alive. But to what degree is he alive? Look at him twenty years from now - his body has developed into manhood. His mind is strong. His spirit is great. He is alive and able to accept the challenges of life. The baby was alive at one week old. The twenty year old man is alive. Both are alive, but the man is vastly more alive than the one week old baby.

The wonderful hope and promise held out to the children of God is not only the beginning of the Christian life and the forgiveness of sin, but an ever abounding life in Christ which overcomes sin, which makes Jesus Christ increasingly real to us. Rather than growing more bitter, we grow sweeter in life. As life moves along, Christ becomes more real. Our testimony becomes more powerful because we have let God do His great work in our hearts.

Is this your testimony? You say you are a Christian. Is Christ more real and dear ~~and victorious~~ to you today than He has ever been? If He is not, why not? You can bring out all kinds of problems, but the problem is you, not your wife, not your job, *etc.* It is you -- self! You have not appropriated Christ's answer for the problem. God wants you to live, not die. Which will you choose?