**Lesson 13**

**The Spirit Cleansing**

“The title of this chapter may possibly surprise some readers who have supposed that cleansing from sin is by the blood of Christ alone. Judicially it is so, but in connection with experiential purging, certain distinctions need to be drawn in order to obtain a clearer understanding.”

There are several causes for the cleansing of the believer from his or her sin.

**1.** As we well know, the blood of Christ is the **meritorious and procuring** cause of our cleansing from sin. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

* The cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ is a judicial act. Just as our justification by faith is a judicial act in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, rendering us “not guilty” of our sin and under God’s wrath and condemnation, in the same way the blood of Christ shed on the cross is the grounds for the legal transaction of our justification.
* The blood of Jesus was the payment that made our justification possible. But this transaction is only a judicial one.

**2.** But it is the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit that is the **efficient** cause of our cleansing from sin.

* The Holy Spirit applies the blood of the atonement through the faith that He gives us.
* It is the Holy Spirit who actually cleanses us from sin. “It is by the Holy Spirit our eyes are opened to see and our hearts to feel the enormity of sin, and thus are we enabled to perceive our need of Christ’s blood. It is by the Spirit we are enabled to trust in the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice now that we realize what hell-deserving sinners we are.”

**3.** For this reason, our faith is the **instrumental** cause of our cleansing. Until we believe, the blood of the atonement is not yet applied.

It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that our eyes are opened to see and our hearts made to feel the enormity of sin, and thus are we enabled, by faith, to perceive our need of the Savior’s blood.

**The purpose of this lesson is to examine the specific work of the Spirit in cleansing the souls of believers . . . the process known as “mortification.”**

**The Awful Warning**

***Romans 8:12-13— 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***

In Romans 8:12-13 the apostle Paul is addressing the Lord’s people, those people whom Paul describes in v. 12 as ***brethren*** who are ***under obligation*** to the Lord.

* The King James Version more accurately translates the phrase ***under obligation*** as ***debtors***.
* As Christians we are ***debtors*** **to Christ** who redeemed us and ***debtors*** to **the Holy Spirit** who regenerated us.
* In Romans 8:12-13 the apostle Paul correctly instructs that the redeemed are ***debtors*** who owe our submission to Christ and the Holy Spirit who saved us.
* Because we are ***debtors*** ***under obligation*** to God, the apostle sees fit to issue a warning to those who fail to live godly lives.
* Paul’s intent is to give us an apprehension of the grave danger of those who fail to heed this warning, that it may influence us.

**An examination of Romans 8:13**

In Romans 8:13 the phrases ***according to the flesh*** and ***deeds of the body*** are synonymous. What do these two phrases mean or refer to?

* “In this verse, “the body” is the same as “the flesh.” They are equivalent terms for the corruption of nature.
* The emphasis is here placed upon the body because it is the tendency of indwelling sin to pamper and please our baser part. The soul of the unregenerate acts for no higher end than does the soul of a beast—to gratify his carnal appetites.
* The “deeds of the body,” then, have reference not only to the outward actions, but also the springs from which they proceed.”
* Just as the hypocritical Pharisees believed they were keeping God’s Law because they were making outward obedience to it, so sinful man deludes himself that if he can simply restrain himself from outward acts of sin, that he is being a “good person.”
* The fact is, even without committing outward acts of sin, sinful thoughts and desires are just as wicked and destructive as the outward manifestations.

The phrase ***if you live according to the flesh*** is a conditional statement in the present tense, which indicates present action that continues into the future.

* The use of the conditional statement indicates two outcomes are possible. In this case the two possible conditions are given: **you do continue to live according to the flesh** or **you cease living according to the flesh**.
* The use of the present tense is significant because it indicates present action. As Pink well notes, “it is to be noted that the Apostle did not say, “If ye *have* lived after the flesh ye shall die,” for everyone of God’s children did so before He delivered them from the power of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son. No, it is, “If ye *live* after the flesh”: **now**. It is a continual course, a steady perseverance in the same, that is in view.
* To ***live according to the flesh*** means to persistently follow the inclinations and solicitations of inward corruption, to be wholly under the dominion of the depravity of fallen human nature.
* To ***live according to the flesh*** is to be in love with sin, to serve it contentedly, to make self-gratification the trade and business of life.”

Pink calls our attention to the warning in Romans 8:13: ***if you live according to the flesh, you will die***. “That is a rule to which there is no exception. No matter what your experience or profession, no matter how certain of your conversion or how orthodox your belief.” What ***death*** is spoken of here?

* God said to Adam in Genesis 2:17— ***“but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."*** Just as God was referring to eternal, spiritual death (separation from God), so Paul intends the same meaning here.
* “O the madness of men in courting eternal death, rather than leave their sinful pleasures and live a holy life. O the folly of those who think to reconcile God and sin, who imagine they can please the flesh and yet be happy in eternity notwithstanding.”

**The duty to mortify sin**

Paul continues in Romans 8:13— ***. . . but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body . . . .***

The King James Version states it this way . . . ***if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body…***

* The terms ***put to death*** and ***mortify*** are translated from the Greek term *thanatoō*, meaning “to kill, destroy or render extinct.”

Arthur Pink lists three ways we must ***put to death*** sin.

**1. First**, we must put to death sin’s **damning or condemning power**.

* This is the legal power sin has whereby it brings the soul under the wrath of God.
* This power is obtained from the Law of God that declares. In John 8:24 the Lord Jesus declares, ***"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."***
* But, as the Lord states, for those who have received faith in Christ, sin is ***mortified***, or ***put to death*** as to its legal condemning power.

**2. Second**, **sin has a ruling and reigning power**, whereby it keeps the soul under wretched slavery and continual bondage.

* The *reign* of sin consists in the in-being of sin unopposed by a principle of grace.
* Thus, sin is effectually “mortified” in its reigning at the first moment of regeneration, for at the new birth a principle of spiritual life is implanted, and this lusts against the flesh, opposing its solicitations, so that sin is unable to dominate as it would (Gal 5:17); and this breaks it tyranny.

**3. Third**, **sin has an indwelling and captivating power**, whereby it continually assaults the principle of spiritual life, beating down the Christian’s defenses, battering his armor, routing his graces, wasting his conscience, destroying his peace, and at last bringing him into a woeful captivity unless it be mortified.

* Corruption does not lie dormant in the Christian. Though it does not reign supreme (because of a principle of grace to oppose it), yet it molests and often prevails to a very considerable extent.
* Because of this, the Christian is called upon to wage a constant warfare against it. **This experiential power is the daily battle that we are engaged in. Though we have been given the ultimate victory in Christ, we must still daily engage the enemy and defeat it.**

**But who is able mortify sin?**

“Unless the Christian devotes all his powers to a definite, uncompromising, earnest, constant warfare upon indwelling sin; unless he diligently seeks to weaken its roots, suppress its motions, restrain its outward eruptions and actions, and seeks to put to death the enemy within his soul—he is guilty of the basest ingratitude to Christ. Unless he does so, he is a complete failure in the Christian life, for it is impossible that both sin and grace should be healthy and vigorous in the soul at the same time. If a garden is overrun with weeds, they choke and starve the profitable plants, absorbing the moisture and nourishment they should feed upon.

* So, if the lusts of the flesh absorb the soul, the graces of the Spirit cannot develop.
* If the mind is filled with worldly or filthy things, then meditation on holy things is crowded out.
* Occupation with sin deadens the mind for holy duties.

“But who is sufficient for such a task? Who can expect to gain the victory over such a powerful enemy as indwelling sin? Who can hope to put to death that which defies every effort the strongest can make against it?

* Ah, were the Christian left entirely to himself, the outlook would be hopeless and the attempt useless. But, thanks be to God that such is not the case. The Christian is provided with an efficient Helper: “***greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world***” (1Jo 4:4).
* It is only “***through the Spirit***” we can, in any measure, successfully “***mortify the deeds of the body***.”

**Types of false mortification**

It is most important that we distinguish between false and true mortification. Regarding **mortification of sin**, Pink first points out what false mortification consists of.

**Pagan mortification**— is merely suppressing such sins as nature itself discovers and from such reasons and motives as nature suggests (Rom 2:14).

* This tends to *hide* sin rather than mortify it.
* Pagan mortification does not seek to be obedient to God. The pagan merely desires to conceal his sin from the world so as to have a good name among men.

**Popish (Roman Catholic) mortification**— This is a superstitious “mortification.”

* This type of mortification consists in the neglect of the body, abstaining from marriage, certain kinds of meat, and apparel.
* Such things have “a show of piety” and are highly regarded by the carnal world; but, not being commanded *by God*, they have no spiritual value whatsoever.
* In fact, such types of mortification serve to weaken the natural man and make him more prone to sin. Man-made acts of piety fail to mortify sin.

**Protestant mortification**—is no different than the superstitious Roman Catholic practices.

* Under the mistaken desire for personal holiness, some Protestants legalistically avoid certain people or insist upon abstinence from certain practices where God requires temperance.
* For example, in previous generations it was considered sinful to dance or attend social balls. There are many today who believe that it is sinful to drink alcoholic beverages. But does the word of God ascribe sin to such actions?

**Three core principles of true mortification**

**First**, **it is necessary to *weaken* sin’s root**. “It is of little avail to chop off the heads of weeds while their roots remain in the ground—nor is much accomplished by seeking to correct outward habits while the heart be left neglected.

* ***Matthew 23:26— "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.***

**Second, in *suppressing* the risings of inward corruptions**: by turning a deaf ear to their voice, by crying to God for grace so to do, by pleading the blood of Christ for deliverance. Make conscience of evil thoughts and imaginations: do not regard them as inevitable, still less cherish them; turn the mind to holy objects.

**Third, in *restraining* its outward acts.** When sinful thoughts and desires succeed in rising through our efforts to suppress them we must then take definitive action to deny and restrain from acting upon them.

***Titus 2:11-12— 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,***

**Our Helper**

Though we have been saved by grace and that grace now enlivens our souls, it is not solely in our power to mortify sin. That is why Paul teaches us in Romans 8:13 that ***by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body***.

* The Holy Spirit is the effective Helper.
* Men may employ the aids of inward rigor and outward severity, and they may for a time stifle and suppress their evil habits; but unless the Spirit of God is at work in us, nothing can amount to true mortification.

**And how does the Holy Spirit mortify sin in us?**

* First, it is the Holy Spirit who causes us to see the sin that is to be mortified, opening it to the view of the soul, stripping it of its deceits, exposing its deformity.
* Second, it is the Spirit who gradually weakens sin’s power, acting as “***the Spirit of burning***” (Isa 4:4), consuming the dross.
* Third, it is the Spirit who reveals and applies the efficacy of the cross of Christ, in which there is contained a sin-mortifying virtue, whereby we are “***conformed to His death***” (Phi 3:10).
* Fourth, it is the Spirit who strengthens us with might in the inner man, so that our graces—the opposites of the lusts of the flesh—are invigorated and called into exercise.

“But how do I mortify sin? How do I keep sinful thoughts and desires from overwhelming me and causing me to sin?” These questions are in the forefront of every Christian mind. Regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in us, Pink makes the point that “it is not, “if the Spirit mortifies,” nor even, “if the Spirit through you mortifies,” but, “if **you**through the Spirit mortifies”!

**In other words,** the Christian is not passive in the process of mortification, but activein this work.”

Arthur Pink points out how we are to actively mortify sin through the Spirit. In the following points note the use of the active voice in these phrases . . .

* We are instructed to “***cleanse ourselves***from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2Co 7:1).
* We are exhorted to “***build up yourselves***on your most holy faith” and “***keep ourselves***in the love of God” (Jude 20-21).
* By the power of the Spirit in him Paul could say, “***I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection***” (1Co 9:27).
* It is by yielding to the Spirit’s impulses, heeding His strivings, submitting ourselves unto His government, that any measure of success is granted us in this most important work.

The believer is not passive in this work. **The gracious operations of the Spirit were never designed to be a substitute for the Christian’s discharge of his duty**.

* True, His influence is indispensable, but it does not relieve us from our individual responsibility.
* “Little children, ***keep yourselves***from idols” (1 John 5:21) emphasizes our obligation, and plainly intimates that God requires from His people something more than a passive waiting for Him to stir them into action.
* **Beware of cloaking a spirit of slothful indolence under an apparent jealous regard for the honor of the Spirit**.
* Is no self-effort required to escape the snares of Satan by refusing to walk in those paths which God has forbidden? Is no self-effort to be made in breaking away from the evil influence of god- less companions? Is no self-effort called for to dethrone an unlawful habit?
* Mortification is a task to which every Christian must address himself with prayerful and resolute earnestness. Nevertheless, it is a task far transcending ourfeeble powers.

Finally, in Romans 8:13 we receive a promise that ***if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live***. Does this promise speak only of our future glorified eternal life or is there a present component to the promise?

* It seems that the primary emphasis is the comparison between eternal wrath and eternal life through one’s obedience to this instruction. However we should also consider and remember that our earthly lives are also impacted by our striving for obedience.
* This doesn’t mean that life will get easier for us, but we can be assured that our life in obedience will be more joy-filled as we find ourselves walking with the Spirit guiding us. After all, the purpose of trials in our lives is to conform us more and more into the image of Christ.
* And if we are truly striving to be obedient, the Spirit will affirm in us that we are walking well.