

Killing Remaining Sin

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We would like to read from God's holy Word two portions of Scripture: first, Mark 9:43-50, which is our text this evening; and then from Romans seven.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.¹

And now Romans 7:14-25.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

¹ Mark 9:43-50.

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.²

Thus far the reading of sacred Scripture.

Dear congregation, too many people today think that Jesus Christ is soft on sin, because of his mercy, his love, his gospel grace. Very few people realize that nobody talked about the radicality of sin, the consequences of sin, the heinous nature of sin and hell that results from sin so much as did Jesus.

I read this past week of a scholar who counted 1870 verses that Jesus spoke directly in the Bible in his earthly ministry and he reckoned that 13 percent of them dealt with judgment or hell more than any other topic that Jesus addressed. Jesus Christ hates sin. It caused his death. He sees sin as something radical. And tonight I want to bring you a few of the words that he uses when he talks about sin to motivate not just unbelievers, but especially believers to understand the necessity of killing remaining indwelling sin.

With God's help we want to look at Mark nine verses 43 through 50. I will read again only verses 43 and 44 at this time.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.³

Our theme tonight is killing remaining sin. And with God's help we want to look at three thoughts: first, our problem, the problem of remaining sin; second, our duty, our duty to kill it; and, third, our encouragement to do so. Killing remaining sin: our problem, our duty, our encouragement.

The words of our text tonight were spoken to the disciples, not to the world. So they are not, in the first place, an evangelistic word. The Lord Jesus is not explaining here to his disciples how to become Christians. These are men who spent two years already with Jesus. These are men who are looking forward to reigning and ruling with him in his kingdom. And Jesus speaks to these men about the dreadfulness of their sin, about the struggle they have with themselves.

Now Jesus, of course, has warned his disciples about other problems. He has warned them about external persecution. He says men are going to revile you, persecute you, say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Later on he warned them about Satan and how Satan wants to put them in a sieve and destroy them. But here Jesus is talking about an inevitable battle that is disciples will have all their lifetime to their dying breath with themselves, a battle that is the daily experience of every believer, the battle against our own sinful nature.

² Romans 7:14-25.

³ Mark 9:43-44.

Now Jesus brings, of course, a full salvation. Through his blood we are saved from the condemnation of sin. And by his indwelling Spirit we are delivered from the domination of sin. And yet God's way of redeeming us does not include deliverance from our problem of indwelling sin before we die. God does not come in the moment of regeneration when a person is made from dead to alive and becomes a child of God and extract sin from that newborn babe's life the way a dentist extracts decay by extracting a decaying tooth. Rather, the forces of decay remain in the hearts and minds of every believer and these forces need to be resisted. They need to be shrunk. And every Christian gathered in this building tonight knows exactly what I am talking about now. You have all—and I, too—been jolted time and time again with the sudden force of remaining sin. You know what I mean, times of humiliating episodes where you say to yourself, "Did I really say that? Did I really think that? Did I really act that way? And if I have acted that way or spoken that way or thought that way, how can I still be a Christian? Oh, wretched man that I am."

Every true believer, you see, will be groaning Paul's cry even until the day of our death. And is this, you see, that makes the believer feel how little progress he has made in his sanctification, in his Christian life. And yet here in our text the implication is there that the Christian life is always going to be a struggle, not only with the world and Satan, but here also with ourselves and in ourselves. The Lord is telling us here that we must fight against that sin that lies in our own heart, in our own mind, in our own body, our hands, our eyes, our feet. It must be put to death.

Well, that is a stressful message to hear. I don't suppose anyone wants to hear a sermon on this topic. We will try to do anything, congregation, before we declare war on ourselves, on our own indwelling sin. We are always looking for ways to discover some other way of growing as a Christian than through self denial and putting sin to death. We will take short cuts. We don't want to put sin to death.

But there are no shortcuts. Jesus has made plain, the whole Bible has made plain that God has two means for victory over remaining sin. The first means—you all know these, of course—is that we look to Jesus by faith. And the second means is that we repent. We kill sin by repenting of sin. Faith and repentance are God's double way, the two sided coin of Christianity, of genuine mintage that God uses to gain the victory over sin. And so in every Bible book you are going to read these two exhortations: Believe and turn.

And this is the daily life of the Christian, faith and repentance. Looking to Jesus, laying aside the sin that so easily besets us, trusting in Jesus and putting sin to death, putting on Jesus and putting off all kinds of sin.

Well, that is what Jesus is talking about here, our problem, our need to kill, to mortify sin.

Now this subject of killing sin or mortification which among the reformers and puritans was a very common subject, has actually been marginalized in most churches about 150 years ago. And since that time the Church has become characterized by the rise of

holiness and perfectionist movements, the Pentecostal churches, Assembly of God churches have gained in adherents more than anyone else. And these churches which detest our subject today teach so often that the Christian life is not really a struggle. It is a mere letting go and letting God. Letting go and go to work quietly in our lives. Then we can avoid the battle.

Just this past week I received a letter from a man I never ever heard of. He just read my new book *Overcoming the World* and he wanted me to know that though there were some things he agreed with in the book, I made Christianity too hard, he said. I learned just let go and let go and that is all there is to the Christian life. And he said, "I am not going to worry so much about sin because Jesus has died for that. I am just going to let God do his work and I am going to relax."

That is so common in Christianity today, an effortless Christianity, you rest in Jesus and all is well. The hard sweating work the puritans spoke of in the way of sanctification, the spiritual warfare, the putting to death of sin is not necessary.

"Peace, peace," they cry, but there is no peace with sin.

Jesus says, "If your hand offends you, cut it off. If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your foot offends you, cut it off."

This is a problem. And it is a problem with every true believer. There is no believer sitting here tonight that doesn't have a struggle with indwelling sin. Paul makes that so clear, crystal clear in Romans seven.

Listen to the words that Paul uses to describe it there in Romans seven, or look at it with me, if you will, verse 23. He refers to this as "the law of sin," Romans 7:23

"... the law of sin which is in my members."⁴

Verse 24.

"... the body of this death."⁵

Verse 18.

"...my flesh."

Verse 17.

"...sin that dwelleth in me."⁶

⁴ Romans 7:23.

⁵ Romans 7:24.

⁶ Romans 7:17.

And then the next chapter, verse two.

“...the law of sin and death.”⁷

You see, there is still so much flesh, Paul is saying. Sinful nature living within me, even after I have become a true believer.

And we display those works of the flesh so often, don't we? Every time we show self pity, every time we are full of bitterness, every time we are tempted to retaliate or when we lust or when we are covetous or unforgiving or deceived, or proud or hate or are angry. Indwelling sin is springing up.

Did you ever wonder why Paul refers to this as a law? Isn't that a strange word? Paul uses the word “law” to show the power that sin still wields in our lives. It is a good word because it exposes the struggle.

You see, the law says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” for example. And it demands our obedience. But indwelling sin cries out, “Go ahead and flirt a little bit and obey the desires of the flesh and go with the flow and why be different? Fulfill your lusts.”

And the struggle is like a law, like the law of gravity. Gravity is a force that makes us obey it. Well, sin is sort of like that. Sin is a force that says, “I will make you obey me. I will threaten or I will make sin sweet. One way or another I will constrain you to do what I want you to do.”

And so the evils that those of us who are believers do not wish to do, Paul says, the law of sin constrains us to do.

It is like there is a law inside of us, even though it doesn't dominate us, thanks be to God, it is still very powerful. If you try going all day without eating there is a law of hunger that kicks in. And your body cries out for something to eat. Oh, still, Paul says, still in the believer, there is a law inside of him. There is something inside of him that says, “Feed my desires.”

And, you see, the power, the problem of this problem is that it is an internal problem. I have to go inside to find it. That is the problem with so many Pentecostals today and so many holiness movements. They teach the perfection of man, but they teach that sin is nothing but external sin. They don't probe the heart. But when you go in and in and in and you probe the depth of your heart, the depth of your soul, the depth of your flesh, you find that this problem afflicts you from within and that compounds the whole problem, because sin is like a raging river carrying us along. We fight against it. But sometimes we feel helpless in that battle.

Now the unbeliever, of course, has a conscience, but he doesn't fight against sin the way a believer fights. The unbeliever is prone to go with the flow, but the believer, you see,

⁷ Romans 8:2.

fighters this. It is like people, children, it is like people on the upper Niagara River going along with the flow. The next bend is the Niagara Falls, but they don't know it. They are ignorant of it and so they enjoying themselves in the boat and even if they get bumped out of the boat, they still think they are enjoying the water. It is not so bad. It is not so dangerous. But the believer realizes they are flirting with sin, tampering with sin indulging in indwelling sin. It is like going down the river fast with the Niagara Falls around the corner. He knows the danger, the consequences of sin.

Now Paul will tell us that the believer knows this problem best when he is at his best. That is to say, when we want to do good, then evil is present with us. When we are closest to God, evil is there.

It is when the disciples were in the service of the Lord Jesus, seeking to do his will, seeking to minister, but they would find the laws of cowardice and pride and retaliation and brashness and hatred working within them.

And so Paul says, "When I want to do good, I feel the power of evil within me."

That is the pattern, that is the problem. When I would do good, evil is present.

Now this law of sin never takes it easy, never takes a vacation, never has a sabbath rest. It is a permanent guest in our hearts. There are times in the struggle—and you know what I mean, believer—where you wish there would be a break. You wish that sin would pull back so you could refresh yourself, so, perhaps, you could call a truce. But sin never calls a truce. Sin is always on duty. Sin is always suddenly and persistently opposing us. It is always there to wreak havoc.

So you feel an urge to pray. The law of sin interferes and opposes it. If you start all good to go to the prayer meeting tonight and something comes up and the law of sin says, "Oh, well, that is really not an absolute necessity," and you end up not going. You are going not call and encourage a friend who is need, but at the moment a desire stirs up within you to do good. Sin comes along and somehow opposes it and you plans go awry. And a thousand thousand other ways, you see, we are in a constant tug of war against that law of sin and death.

Do we want to pray? Sin opposes. Do we want to meditate? How many times do you... if you go to meditate on the Word... you want to many times. But how often something comes in the way. Sin is always there. Sin is our enemy. And the strength of sin is that it does all of this within us as easily as a fox catches rabbits or a fly catcher catches insects. It is the nature of sin to do this. Sin is an expert in destroying us. You don't have to instruct sin how to sin. It doesn't need an apprenticeship. Sin so easily sins that the Bible speaks of the sin that easily besets us. And when that happens, well, we get mad or we get resentful or we feel sorry for ourselves or bitter or lustful or stingy. Whatever sin it may be, sin in us makes us act in all kinds of ways that are offensive to God.

So that is the problem. Now, secondly, Jesus tells us our duty is to resist sin to the point of death. Our duty is not to lay back and say, “Well, the sin is such a terrible thing and is so powerful, that I must just let go and let God and I am just going to forget about it, forget the struggle and go with the flow.”

No, the Bible says everywhere, and that is the heartbeat of our text, kill sin, mortify sin.

Paul says it in Romans 8:13.

“...if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”⁸

And in Colossians three verse five:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”⁹

So what is indwelling sin? Well, Paul is specific here. He is saying that it is sexual immorality. It is impurity. It is lust. It is evil desires. It is greed. All the sins that belong to our earthly nature, they are latent in every regenerate heart. And, you see, we can boast that we wouldn't sink so low, but Paul built his life and his strategy against sin on the fact that these things were there. He built his strategy against sin on the fact of his own infirmities. And when Jesus approaches us in this text, he is teaching us that it is wise for us to build our lives upon the same platform, the platform of a recognition of our spiritual weakness and our temptability, our remaining temptability. And so Paul says and Jesus says, Jesus says it in graphic ways, picturesquely. Kill sin. Cut it off. Don't explain it. Don't condone it. Don't nourish. Don't cherish. Don't tolerate. Terminate. Destroy sin.

You are indwelt by Jesus Christ, dear believer. You are a new creation in him. You are a Son of God. Be what you are. Reckon yourself dead unto sin, fight against sin. Live according to what you are called to be.

You see, the background of this whole portion is this, that we have no right to live like someone over whom the Lord Jesus Christ has no influence, if we are true believers.

I don't have a single right to condone the smallest sin, the smallest indwelling sin when I have such a Savior as Jesus. And when Jesus says over and over again here, “Cut it off, cut it off, cut it off,” he is saying, “Give no quarter to sin. Give no mercy to sin. Make no truce with sin. How can you transform from sin by the death of the Lamb of God continue to make excuses for sin?” It is illogical. Sadly it happens and you know the process. You try to rationalize it in your own mind, your own thinking pattern. You say, “Well, maybe this isn't too bad or maybe that is not so bad. So and do is doing it.”

⁸ Romans 8:13.

⁹ Colossians 3:5.

No, says Jesus, starve it to death. It wants a little tidbit here. It wants a little touch here, a little taste here, a little morsel to feed its self pity or its resentment or its lust, just a little bit to keep it from dying, a little bit of food.

No, says Jesus, kill it. Starve it. Show it now mercy.

So that is our duty. It is a relentless duty. It is an ongoing duty. It is a life long duty.

If thy hand offend thee, cut it off. If thy foot offend thee, cut it off. If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out.

What does Jesus really mean by this? Of course he doesn't mean that we get out a knife and cut off our hand physically, but he is referring spiritually to what we do with our eyes and our hands and our feet as a reflection of who we are inside and what we must do with those sins. He is talking about a hand that slips into a purse or a wallet or a till and takes out money, a hand that forms a hard fist, a hand that caresses the flesh, a hand that picks up a stone to stone a woman caught in adultery, a hand that is raised high in voting for the punishment of the innocent, a hand that in a fit of temper slaps a child too hard, a hand that picks up yet another glass of whiskey and drinks it, a hand that switches on the web and guides the mouse to an immoral channel.

Cut your hand off, Jesus says. Cut that sin off rather than let your hand act like that. Don't feed that sin. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell where the fire never goes out.

Then Jesus speaks about our feet, our feet causing us to sin. He is talking, of course, about pushing your foot down on the accelerator on a busy road or tripping up a boy in school you don't like or treading on someone's toes or running along with some gossip to a friend's house or walking with a pounding conscience into places and relationships that cannot please God.

If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

And then, finally, Jesus talks about the eye which causes a person to sin. He is talking about the eye that looks away when there is a cry for help, the eye whose eyelids fall and slumber when there is work to be done, the eye that shows admiration for what is carnal and materialistic and worldly, the eye that wanders around the congregation when the sermon is about on our need to repent and to be saved, the eye that speaks murder, the eye that doges duty, the eye that seeks the place of prominence, the unforgiving eye, the lustful eye, the eye that lingers upon immodest magazine covers at the grocery store, the checkout lane, the eye that lusts, the eye that covets, the eye that disdains, the eye that hates my neighbor, the eye that rolls itself in a sense of superiority looking down on others.

Cut it off, pluck it out. Don't go on this way.

Oh, dear congregation, what do we do with our feet and our eyes and our hands? What do your eyes see and read and gaze upon? What videos do you rent? What websites do you visit? How many chapters of the Word of God do you read? Are you starving sin and promoting righteousness? Are you engaging with all the power given to you in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, using the resources of Jesus to fight against sin? Or are you coddling it or going with the flow?

Jesus says, "If your eye offends you, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter to the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

How do you do it? It is so hard. How do you kill sin, remaining sin?

Well, the Puritan John Owen wrote a whole book on it, but let me condense it down into three thoughts that he gives us that are very valuable, I believe, the first is he says, "We have to weaken our lust habitually."

Well, let me just read a paragraph here from Owen, because it is so good. He describes it like this. He says, "When a man is nailed to a cross, he at first struggles, strives, and cries out with great strength and might; but as his blood and spirits waste, his strivings are faint and seldom, his cries hoarse, and scarce to be heard. So when a man first determines to conquer a lust or sin, and to deal with it in earnest, it struggles with great violence to break loose; it cries with earnestness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved. By mortification, the blood and spirits of it are let out, it moves seldom and faintly, cries sparingly, and is scarce heard in the heart; it may sometimes have a dying pang that makes an appearance of great vigor and strength, but it is quickly over, especially if it kept from considerable success."

And then he goes on to say, "This is what Paul describes in Romans six." He says, "Sin is crucified by being fastened to the cross. And why?" Well, he says, "so that the body of sin might be brought to nothing."

So Owens' thought, you see, is this, that the power of sin is weakened and abolished little by little that we be no longer enslaved to sin when we starve that sin so that sin does not become our master and control us as before.

And Owen concludes, "This includes not only our fleshly desires, but also those of the mind and the will which are in opposition to God."

Secondly, we are never to give up resisting against sin. We are always to remember sin is our enemy. And we have to destroy it at every possible way and to every possible means. And the more we get to understand the devices of Satan, get to know the ways of sin, how sin attacks us, what its strategy is, to be ready for it, the better.

I will tell you what Owen says again.

“This is how men deal with their enemies. They search out their plans. They ponder their goals. They consider how and by what means they have prevailed over them in the past so that they can be defeated. Continue to attack your lusts every day.”

You see, one of our problems is we... well, sin is like a monster and once we think we kill that monster, boys and girls, and we see it laying at our feet and we have had a little success, we tend to relax and we think the battle is over. But suddenly before we know it that monster gets up on his feet again and attacks us again. He was dormant, but he wasn't dead. Or we have let down our guard.

Owen puts it this way.

“Even when we think that a lust is dead, because it is quiet, we must labor still then to give it new wounds and fresh blows every day.”

This is a battle. This is a holy war.

Today there are so many people that still don't understand that we are at war with terrorism. They don't understand it. They think this is all just George Bush activity. And so all these people are killed in London a few weeks ago and, oh, they still say it is George Bush's fault. He shouldn't have started this war. The problem is terrorism, senseless murder, sin. We are at war, congregation. This nation is at war. Your relatives, many of you have relatives that are war in Iraq. They are laying down their lives. Some of them are engaged and they are laying down their lives for our sakes so that we can go free. We are at war. The Christian is at war. We can't let down our guard.

Thirdly, we are to gain strength to defeat future temptation by defeating present temptation now.

You see, if we fail now we are going not fail easier tomorrow. If we are successful now, by the grace of the Holy Spirit it is going to be easier to fight temptation tomorrow.

A poet put it this way.

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin.
Each victory will help you some other to win.

You see, we weaken our lusts not only by starving them, but by encouraging those graces that stand in direct opposition to that lust.

May I repeat that? I believe that is a very important thought.

We weaken our lusts not only by starving them, but by encouraging those graces that stand in direct opposition to that particular lust.

You see, what best weakens pride, but growing in humility? What best weakens anger, but growing in gentleness? What best weakens irritability, but growing in patience? As you grow in purity, your uncleannesses weaken. We will never be at a point prior to our death where the battle is completely over. But the graces of the Spirit help us weaken the lusts that fight against us. And those graces are strengthened by a constant looking to Jesus for strengths and for courage. And so we need to look at the positive graces, plead them, seek to live them out, seek to feed them to ourselves through the Word rather than feed our lusts through sin.

And then Jesus in our text gives us a very strange encouragement to pursue this duty.

Now the Bible speaks a great deal about a number of encouragements for us to exercise self denial and mortification against indwelling sin. And we could actually have a series of messages, a profitable series of messages on these various encouragements. We could talk about how keeping the Lord's Day holy encourages a dampening of our lusts and a promotion of the positive motivating energy. I talk about how fellowship and communion with other believers strengthens us or the biblical minster we hear each sabbath. Or we could talk about Paul's motivation of the constraining power of the love of Jesus Christ. Is that motivation that motivated Joseph kept him in the house of Potiphar.

He said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God who has been so good to me and whom I love?"

We could talk about the need and the blessing of keeping a good conscience, one that is sensitive to the guilt and the danger of certain sins. We could talk about the danger of places of temptation, the power of the modern media and how we ought to urge one another to avoid occasions that make us more vulnerable to sinning in these areas.

I think here of Herod who said to his soldiers, "Kill the child or one day he will be a man and he is going to come back to kill me."

Well, that is how ruthless we must be, of course, in our war against our baby lusts. If we don't kill them when they are babies, they will come back to haunt us and destroy us.

But most of all, of course, we would talk, if we had to talk about these encouragements, we would talk about mortifying sin by looking to Jesus. That is the strongest encouragement of all, isn't it, that he is with his people, he has power over temptation. He has endured all temptation. He, by his Spirit, gives you strength to endure temptation.

No one who has ever fought this battle has looked to him in vain. All fullness of grace is found in him and he can do everything. He can do abundantly, exceedingly above all that we ask or think. Go to Jesus and all these answers would be good answers, but none of these answers are the encouragement, the kind of motivation Jesus gives us in this particular text.

What is his motivation here? He brings the fear of hell to bear upon his own disciples. I say that is surprising. Don't you think? His disciples are saved. They are not going to hell. But three times he is talking, remember, to his disciples.

Cut off your hand that offends, lest you go into hell where there fire will never be quenched. Cut off your foot lest ye go with two feet into hell where the fire will never be quenched. Pluck out your eye. It is better to do that than have two eyes, to be cast, thrown into hell fire is the original Greek.

You know, we lay a baby in a crib, don't we, tenderly? That is not the way we go to hell, congregation. God on the day of judgment will not lay tenderly in hell if we refused to cut off our lust. God will cast us, Jesus said. These are Jesus' words, not Jonathan Edwards' words, not John Calvin's words, not my words, Jesus' words. He will throw us into hell.

Jesus brings the doctrine of hell to his own people and the word he uses here is not Hades, which sometimes refers, as you know, to grave and other things. But it is Gehenna, the word that always refers to hell. Gehenna is derived from Gehinnom. It is a place south of Jerusalem. It became known as a place of fire. That is where the children are roasted to death as sacrifices to Moloch in the time of Ahaz and Manasseh. And later it became the place where the city's garbage was burned. There was always a fire going there. And gradually that word, Gehenna or Gehinnom became synonymous with hell. And wherever it is used in Scripture from there on in, it is always used to refer to that hell where soul and body are cast away into the infernal pit of everlasting darkness, separated from God's mercy which will happen to all those who refuse to believe the gospel and refuse to repent before God.

Well what an amazing encouragement. You say, "Encouragement?" Yes. Encouragement.

God can use this to motivate us. And anything he uses to motivate us is an encouragement. You see, these words that Jesus uses here are used back in Isaiah 66 verse 24. Jesus is just repeating them. He wants to remind us that people are to be cast into a hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. There will be no end to the judgment of those who refuse to believe the gospel and those who didn't resist their sins. Well, now their hands and eyes and feet to do whatever pleased them. This is what Jesus says.

And my conviction to bring that you and to me to night is precisely because it is he that says it. A Christian is someone who must mortify the lust of his hand and his foot and his eye and the whole totality of his life because the hand stands for what we do, the foot stands for where we go and the eye stands for what we see.

And so I ask you tonight. I ask myself tonight. Are you crucifying yourself? Are you killing the lust of the flesh? Are you serious in this battle?

Those who are never serious in this battle will end in hell with both eyes and both hands and both feet. And there says Jesus three times over, "The worm will not die." And that worm is, of course, our conscience. We will remember everything. Hell will be a foul place where our conscience will endlessly be gnawing at us, eating away, devouring, giving us no rest.

In this life you often hear of people whose consciences drive them mad. Sometimes people have escaped from being arrested for many years, sometimes for decades and finally their conscience has been so speaking for so many years they turn themselves in. They can't stand it anymore. The conscience is driving them crazy.

Well, hell is like that.

People today go to therapists, psychoanalysts, psychologists with their troubled consciences. Many of them need help in various ways, yes. But a good number of them, I am sure, need Christ more than they need therapy. They need a clean conscience. But they can't find it.

Well in hell the conscience of the hell will be sensitized. It will be reawakened, but there is no way of undoing the wrong. In fact, in hell we will go on sinning because we will never be at peace with God.

John Flavel writes, "Conscience which should have been the sinner's curb on earth will be come the whip that will lash its soul in hell. That which was the seat and center of all guilt will now become the seat and the center of all torment."

Oh, my dear friend, whether converted or unconverted tonight. If you come to hell, if you refuse to cut off your lust and you live the way you want, doing what you want with your hands and your eyes and feet, Jesus says you will be thrown into hell. And when you are thrown into hell, every prayer your father uttered for you, every family worship, every plea, every example, every church service, everything will come back to you. Your memory will be perfect in hell. It will be there gnawing away like a never dying worm. You will ever be dying and yet never dead. Oh, what an awful thing.

Now does that mean that God's people will end in hell? No. No. They won't. But Jesus uses warnings like this to reawaken us. He uses other motivations. He uses all those motivations I just told you about, his love, his power, his grace. But he also uses the warnings. Ninety-six verses in the book of Hebrews alone of warning to believers not to give up the battle, not because they will give up the battle, but because warnings are one of the motivations Jesus uses to encourage us not to give up the battle.

When our children were very young there on Leonard Street, I can still see my wife so insistent with each child. Make sure you don't go anywhere near the road. You can't go beyond the food bank and the garage there. You can't go beyond that, because to go to the road, the parents... it can kill you. She warned them. But at the same time, she never

let them beyond her eye beyond that food bank. That is what God does with us. He warns us even as he protects us. But he uses the warnings to help us protect ourselves. It is his gift. His warning is his gift.

What would you think of my wife and I if we never said to the children, “Don’t worry about the road. Go play wherever you want to play”?

We wouldn’t love them. God loves his people so much that he warns them of the dangers of hell fire. He warns them. He warns us tonight. Kill sin or sin will kill you. Gouge it out of your life. Sever it from you. It must be decisive work. It must be a complete work. It must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Will we ever be perfect? Of course we won’t ever be perfect. But if that is not our goal to be perfect, we will not be living Christian lives.

Too many Christians say, “I will never be perfect anyway. So I know this is wrong, but...”

But what, congregation? We are never to excuse sin. Oh, as soon as you feel that language arise in your mind, you say to your own mind, “Oh, what a fool I was. Do I now remember what sin has cost my Savior? It has cost him the cross. How can I sin against God?”

Cut it out. Cast it away.

Now we need to do this by the Spirit’s power. The battle for purity is serious and life long. Thank God it is not we have to fight alone. Thank God the Holy Spirit is there to help us. It is by the Spirit’s power we mortify the deeds of the flesh. He will help us. He will impel us. And yet we must do it. He gives us the strength to do it, but we must do it. He is not going to do it for us as if we are somehow another person beside us. He gives us strength to do it and we must carry it out.

Sinclair Ferguson in one of his books says this.

“There can be no reconciliation between a Christian and sin, no platform for negotiation. If we don’t engage in the effort to conquer sin, we may be sure it will conquer us. We must put out the flames of hell in our hearts or we will find ourselves exposed to the flames of hell and separation from God permanently.”

Well, dear congregation, do you know there is a war going on? During the Second World War there was a London minister whose home was hit by a bomb and when he got out of the air raid shelter he saw his home go up in flames. He had nothing left but the shirt on his back. And that day he went to a store and he bought some clothes with the help of a friend. He bought a suit, bought some shirts, socks, ties, sweater. And the lady that was waiting on him got a little nervous and a little upset with him. And she said to him,

getting a bit irritated, “Don’t you know there is war on and you are buying all these things?”

There was a war on. There is a war on. And that war will last all our lifetime. It will never end. We don’t know when the war with Iraq will end. We hope soon. But this war we know when it will end. It will end, dear believer, in your last breath. And until then you will be salted with fire. That is what Jesus goes on to conclude in verse 49.

“For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.”¹⁰

Well, what does that mean? Well in the Old Testament the sacrifices were salted with salt. But under the New Testament those whose lives are living sacrifices presented to God are going to be salted, Jesus says, with fire. There is going to be fiery trials on the way to glory. And we have to pass through them and it is as we pass through them that that war kicks in more intensely than ever.

God designs trials to come in appointed times in our lives. And through those trials he enables us to kill sin. Those trials are actually good for us. And so when people sympathize with us in our trials we ought to say to them, “It is all right. Everyone will be salted with fire. There is no other way to enter the kingdom of heaven, but than to come in through great tribulation. Count it all joy when you are salted with fire.”

And so there is a war going on. There is two forces at work. God is at work in our world. His people ought to line up behind him. Forces of evil are at work in this world and there is no time, no place for self indulgent worship, for self deceiving spiritualities that make the Christian life to be nothing more than coming to church and perhaps reading the Bible now and then.

No. We must declare an all out assault against sin. If we will not mortify remaining sin, can we be Jesus’ disciples? If we live our lives in such a way without saltiness? How will we make them salty again, he says in verse 50?

You see, there is war going on. The kingdom of God is coming. Sacrifices have to be made. We have to say no to certain things. We have to cut out certain things if we are going to be salt in the world, if we are going to be the flavor of the world.

Salt also stings, of course. And the saltiness of the lives of God’s people stings the world. That is why Jesus says at the end of this chapter, “Be at peace among yourselves as believers, yes, but to the world we must sting like salt stings. Have salt in yourselves and have peace with one another.”

Well, how is it with you and me tonight? Let me close by asking a few questions.

Am I at war with sin? The sin that I find in my own heart and my own body, am I serious about this battle? Or am I treating sin casually? Am I using the gospel in any way to

¹⁰ Mark 9:49.

minimize the dreaded character of sin? Am I prepared to be cleansed with fiery trials if this is God's will? Am I longing for this congregation to be salt of the earth? Longing for God to deal with the blandness and decay of the world around us and among us which is without Christ? Am I maintaining a loving relationship with fellow believers at peace among one another even as we seek to be salt in the earth?

To kill sin is absolutely critical. The sacrifices it takes are well worth it. The resulting transformation into more love and gentleness and humility and strength is worth every sacrifice we make, but especially because one day we know all these fiery trials will make us more like our Savior and one day we will go to be with him and to be like him and then the good fight, the fight of faith, the holy war will be over.

May the Lord make us all victors in this conflict? Amen.