



Title: Victoriously Living Over the Flesh

Theme: Mortifying the Flesh

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ^{Ro 8:13} For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ^{Ro 8:14} because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Romans 8:12-14)

Man’s most aggressive enemy, “The Flesh”

Donald Ballar, Reader’s Digest, shared this story of an instructor of student truck drivers. The instructor gave this scenario to his class. “You are in an 18-wheeler with a heavy load, barreling down a mountainous two-lane highway. Ed, your co-driver, is asleep. There are six trucks behind you, and as you come over the top of a hill, one of the trucks behind you pulls out into the left lane to pass. As he comes along side you, you see several trucks coming from the opposite direction moving towards you. One of the trucks coming at you is in your lane because it is passing an on coming truck. There are five trucks behind and one beside you. There are several trucks in front of you and the two out front have both lanes blocked. The question is, ‘What will you do?’

‘The answer is simple’ a student called out. ‘I would wake up Ed.’ ‘Why would you do that?’ asked the instructor. The student replied with, ‘Because, Ed ain’t never seen a truck wreck like this before!’”

I would propose to you that Christians need not wait for a potential wreck with the flesh before they try to prevent a tragedy from happening. God’s Word has preventative measures that will keep the child of God from having a tragic accident with his most aggressive enemy, “The Flesh.”

Listen as I read Romans 8:12-14, “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ^{Ro 8:13} For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ^{Ro 8:14} because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Let us pray!

Where is this battle with “the flesh” fought and how is victory achieved? What are our obligations in regards to the price that Jesus paid upon the Cross of Calvary? Where is the power to overcome “the flesh” to be found?

To whom do Christians have an obligation

All great armies that are victorious in battle are made up of soldiers who know that they have an obligation to fight with all their mind, heart and strength. To whom do Christians have an obligation?

In Romans chapter 8, verse 12, the apostle moves from instruction to exhortation, from what God has done through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to what is expected of the child of God in way of response. There is a strong emphasis on human responsibility in regard to what is truly the reflection of a repentant heart renewed by the Holy Spirit. (The Expositors Bible Commentary)

The obligation is to God, who created man's body, mind and spirit. (Thru the Bible) He gave His one and only Son for the redemption of sinful mankind. (John 3:16) The obligation is to Jesus Christ who purchased God's chosen with His own blood. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

"Obligation" (*opheiletes*) means to be bound by a duty. (Practical Word Studies of the New Testament) It is important to note that this is not an ambition, it is a duty (Bishop Handley Moule). The application is this. With the position that the child of God has in Jesus Christ comes an obligation to live a life worthy of the gospel. (Word meaning in the New Testament) The Christian has a debt to mortify the flesh. (Vines Dictionary of the New Testament) Because of the price that Christ paid for the Christian's soul the child of God is obligated to surrender his mind, heart, tongue and literally every part of His body to the will of God.

Before a battle can be won, there must be the recognition of an enemy

Before a battle can be won, there must be the recognition of an enemy. The most continual aggressive enemy the Christian has is the "sinful nature" or rather the "flesh."

The "flesh" (*sarx*) or that sinful nature has been compared to cancer. It is not like a rotten branch on a tree that can be broken off and gotten out of the way, thus protecting the rest of the tree. No, it lies deep always looking for its opportunity to grow and cause more damage. Matthew Henry wrote, "Sin is a brat which nobody is willing to own up to, a sign that it is a scandalous thing." It is that part in you that always wants to put the blame on someone else.

The apostle Paul writes about the character of the flesh in Galatians 5:17, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

The Minnesota Crime Commission recognizes the power of the sinful nature and admits the truth that every person, if left to himself, will be overcome by the power of the flesh. A few years ago they released this statement. "Every baby starts life as a [potential] savage. He is completely selfish, and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it – his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncles' watch. Deny him these once, and he could go into a rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is, in fact, dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children – not just certain children – are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal..."

Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and the Psalmist wrote, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalms 51:5)

The Bible tells us of the fruit that comes out of a life that has lost its battle with the flesh. It says they "...are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; Gal 5:20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions Gal 5:21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21)

Mortification is the special ministry that enables the child of God to overcome those evil desires that could destroy the Christian's relationship with the Lord

The first step to "Victoriously Living Over the Flesh" is to agree with God that a sinful nature lives in us and the next is to understand what the Bible says about how to walk in victory. The King James Bible 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." (Romans 8:13)

The key word to walking victoriously over the flesh is "mortify" (*thanatoo*). Mortification is the special ministry that enables the child of God to overcome those evil desires that could destroy the Christian's relationship with the Lord. It means to become dead to anything that would feed and give those evil desires strength to overcome you. (The Expositors Bible Commentary; The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament) When you mortify the flesh you are deadening the desire that comes upon you. True mortification will rob sin of its debilitating and emotional distracting influences.

The Apostle Paul says we are to "...count [ourselves] dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ^{Ro 6:12} Therefore [we are] not [to] let sin reign in [our] mortal [bodies] so that [we] obey its evil desires. ^{Ro 6:13} [We are] not to offer the parts of [our] body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer [ourselves] to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of [our] body to Him as instruments of righteousness. ^{Ro 6:14} For sin shall not be [our] master, because [we] are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14)

How can a Christian count himself as dead to sin thus mortifying those sinful desires that come upon him?

Jesus gives a clear teaching that will pave the way of putting to death the sinful nature. He said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ^{Mt 6:23} But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. (Matthew 6:22-23)

There is such a simple truth here that is so powerful and yet many walk blindly to it. Corporations spend millions of dollars on advertising because of the principle Jesus is talking about here. They know what goes in the eyes and ears will have an effect on the human heart and thus goes his life. Movie theaters have promotional ads come up before the movie pointing people's attention to the snack bar. They know once it goes through the eyes and supported with the right music it will have their desired effect on their victims causing pop and candy sales to go up. The snack bar is right in front of you when you walk in to catch the attention of the eye.

The Christian who walks in victory over lust of the flesh is the one who does not feed it through the eye and ears. He does not feed himself pornography, watch TV commercials, or pay much attention to ads that use sex to sell products. The one who walks in victory over the sin full nature is the one who does not feed it. He overcomes improper language because he does not feed that sin by what he watches or read. The Christian who lives in victory over bitterness, worldliness, and the pride of life is one who does not feed those sins by what he allows to influence his life.

Ed Wood shared this story he heard about an Indian who had come to Christ. When asked about his new found faith he described it as having two dogs living inside him. One is like an old dog. He is mean, vicious, unmanageable, and down right un-trainable. The second is like a new dog that is obedient, longs to serve Christ, and gives attention to the Lord. He described the two dogs as always fighting to get his attention and wanting to have control over his entire life. When asked what dog wins he replied back with, "The one I feed the most."

In dealing with the sinful nature, Christians have to become like a man who owns an old dog that is un-trainable, refuses to obey, always finds trouble when turned loose, bites children and causes a path of destruction wherever he goes. Finally the law shows up on his porch with a court order informing this man that he must fulfill his duty and restrain the dog for the protection of himself and the safety of the community. Thus, the man restrains the dog with something that is stronger than himself. He puts the dog on a chain.

Today's text, Romans 8:12-14 informs the Christian of his duty. The restraining order is to mortify the flesh and become dead to that sinful nature.

Every moment of the day we are feeding. What we feed on will grow in our minds and hearts. That is what is going to flow out of our lives. Just as our bodies reflect what and how much we eat, our lives will reflect what we feed the mind, spirit and soul.

The Apostle Paul writes about the empowering agent that enables the child of God to live that victorious life

Once we have the heart to mortify the flesh, we can trust in God's power for victorious living. The child of God who walks in victory is the one who realizes his sin it is not because of defeat, but because of disobedience.

Mark Bubeck wrote, "The flesh is a built-in law of failure, making it impossible for the natural man to please or serve God. It is a compulsive inner force inherited from man's fall, which expresses itself in general and specific rebellion against God and His righteousness. The flesh can never be reformed or improved. The only hope for escape from the law of the flesh is its total execution and replacement by a new life in the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle Paul writes about the empowering agent that enables the child of God to live that victorious life. Romans 8:9-11 says, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ^{Ro 8:10} But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ^{Ro 8:11} And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you."

The Christian who walks in victory over the sinful nature is the child of God who understands the truth that the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is living in them. The victorious Christian agrees with God on what sin is. He desires in his heart to put the flesh to death, then he allows the Holy Spirit to do His cleansing work. Victorious Christians have revelation and illumination of, "...if by the [Holy Spirit] you put to death the misdeeds of the body..." (Romans 8:13)

Only by obedience to the Lord and through the empowering of the Holy Spirit can the child of God live that abundant life promised by Jesus Christ. When the child of God tries to beat the flesh on his own he is defeated because of the sin of disobedience. He still wants to be in charge of his own life. Victory comes through surrender and supernatural empowerment which are received by faith.

The Christian does not need to beat sin. It has already been defeated upon the Cross. He needs only to enjoy the pleasures that come with the duty of living by the power of the Holy Spirit, surrendered to His cleansing and leading. I have spoken with great men of God who enjoy the power of the Holy Spirit helping them to defeat the flesh and continue to find the Holy Spirit's power to keep the sinful nature subdued under the authority of Christ.

They seem to have the heart of the psalmist who wrote, ^{Ps 139:23} Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ^{Ps 139:24} See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:24) They have truly prayed from their hearts, "Lord show me how offensive this sin is to you." The Lord revealed it to them and they experienced a supernatural cleansing from the Holy Spirit because they knew that they could not get victory over it on their own.

There is no really good illustration on how the Holy Spirit helps the child of God overcome the sinful nature. It is a supernatural work that can not be fully explained. All we do know for sure is that confession brings forgiveness and purification. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." "Purify" (*katharizo*) in the spiritual sense is to cleanse from the pollution and guilt of sin.

The purifying work of the Holy Spirit is like the mother who was getting her four year old boy ready for church. She gave him a bath and got him all dressed up. She set him in front of the TV while she got herself ready and told him to keep his eyes focused on the TV.

The little boy became distracted by something outside and he went out to investigate it. In the process he fell down in the mud and wiped off his hands on the front of his pants. He scratches his nose and brushed the hair out of his eyes. In just a few seconds he found himself covered in mud from the top of his head to his toes.

Thinking nothing of his condition the dirty little boy went back and sat in front of the TV. Needless to say, mom was hurt and disappointed over the condition of her little boy. She informed him of his dirty condition and chastised him for his self-centeredness and for acting on his own accord. After his apology, mother forgave him and then got him cleaned up for church.

It is the same with the child of God. Even though his previous sins were washed cleaned by the blood of Christ, his sinful nature has a tendency to distract him from what he is supposed to be doing. Thus, he finds himself soiled once again. The Holy Spirit convicts him, God chastises him, Jesus Christ forgives him and sends the Holy Spirit to clean him up so he can be effective in the true church.

The victorious Christian does not give excuses for his soiled condition. He agrees that his flesh distracted him, took his eyes off what he was supposed to be feeding himself, and in his disobedience he became dirty because of the indulgence of the flesh, the filth of the world and the lie of the devil. He just responds the Lord's chastisements appropriately and then allows the Holy Spirit to clean him up.

Seven truths to victorious living are

Like the mother who sat the cleaned up little boy down to fill his eyes with something good until she returned to take him to church, the Word of God has truths that Christians are to be feeding themselves until Jesus returns for the church.

Seven truths to victorious living are:

One, recognize the fact that it is only by God's enabling that you are going to be able to accomplish His perfect will for you. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." Victorious living begins with a heart that is humble enough to ask the Lord for His help to live right before God.

Two, recognize the need to be filled with the Holy Spirit so you live a life that reflects being led of the Holy Ghost. The apostle exhorts you "...to be filled with the [Holy] Spirit."

Three, begin mortifying the flesh by confessing sins and claim Christ's purchased ownership on your life and body. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Four, saturate your mind with the Word of God and pray for Holy Spirit revelation and illumination so you can understand and live out God's will for you. Romans 12:1-2 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Ro. ^{12:2} Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Five, recognize that every life produces fruit, surrender your heart over to the Holy Spirit's cleansing so you can express the fruit of the Spirit out of your life. Galatians 5:22, 23 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Six, recognize that your body is not evil, it is the sinful nature that is within you, therefore, present your entire body, mind and soul over as instruments to the Lord's use. Romans 16:12,13 says, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather ... offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

Seven, recognize that you must express a life that says, "I love you Lord." Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Mt 22:38 This is the first and greatest commandment." (Matthew 22:37-38)

Those who are victorious over the flesh are willing to examine their lives to see if they are living according to true faith in Jesus Christ and if they have accepted the truth found in the Word of God. (Thru the Bible; Barnes Notes) 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

Are you a natural person whose spirit is dead? Do your bodily senses and your natural desires control you? Are you a worldly Christian who has allowed Christ to enter your life but is still being mastered by the desires of the flesh? Is the big "I" still in control? Or are you a spiritual Christian who has been crucified with Christ and is being controlled by the Holy Spirit?

The child of God has three trucks pushing on him every day of his life. The one labeled "The Flesh" is always the one mowing him toward a collision course. He does not have to wait until he is about to be in the biggest wreck anyone has ever seen before he puts his foot on the brakes. The Biblical way of mortifying the flesh is a sure way of avoiding the heart break that comes from the acts of the sinful nature.

Spiritual Christians are not perfect, but daily they crucify the flesh and consciously allow the Holy Spirit to fill them. When tempted, they invite Christ to fill their lives and they close the door of the flesh. When they sin, they ask for God's forgiveness and strength to help them overcome the next temptation. They continually seek to offer themselves -- mentally, emotionally, and physically -- to Christ to be used for His purposes. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can this occur, and only when He is invited to come in is His awesome presence and power enjoyed.

As you walk in this world you are and will be constantly attacked by the sinful nature, Christian or not. What you feed is what will be dominant over your life. You can give strength to the old man or the new man. Victorious living comes as you walk in the Spirit, as you daily meditate on the Word of God, as you pray and as you associate with other Christians who feed not on worldly things, but on the things of God.

Victory over the flesh, that sinful nature, is accomplished by mortifying the flesh and feeding the new life in Christ through prayerful reading of the Word of God.

Let us pray!