

# NOW WHAT?

## Back to the Basics

### A Call To Arms – Part 1

#### Introduction

Hymns with a military theme used to be a staple in the musical diet of Christians in North America. Singing such hymns as "Stand Up for Jesus, Ye Soldiers of the Cross", "Soldiers of Christ Arise" and "Fight the Good Fight" was commonplace. Perhaps the most often sung of all these hymns was our featured hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers."

Some historians contend that a change in church music occurred about the time of the Vietnam War. Perhaps even with the present fundamentalist extremists actions of Islamists, Christians are reluctant to think of their lives in war-like, militant ways.

The Main Point → Each follower of Jesus Christ is not only expected, but commanded to become a fighter.

The Situation: You have repented of your sin. You have, by grace, been given *new life in Christ*. Christ by grace has saved you from the penalty of sin ("*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 5:1; 8:1, ESV).

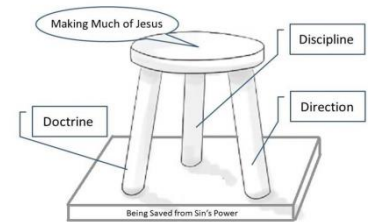
Some day when the Lord returns you and I will be forever saved from the presence of sin. One day Jesus Christ will remove the presence of sin from the believer forever. He will save us even from the presence of sin because the day is coming when He will take us from this world into heaven to be with Him forever. We shall be like Him throughout eternity ("*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:2, ESV)).

But where does that leave you and I now? If we have been saved from the *penalty* of sin and will be saved from the *presence* of sin – what is going on now? Followers of Christ have been re-commissioned on what can be called a *search and destroy mission*. John Owen states it most eloquently:

*"The best believers, who are certainly freed from the condemning power of sin, still need to make it their business to mortify the indwelling power of sin all their life."*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Owen. Mortification of Sin (Kindle Locations 568-569). On the Wing. Kindle Edition.

#### Now What?



The reality of my life and yours (if you are a Christian) is that even after we are born again, sin still remains in our old nature. *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8, ESV). We also have a new nature that is pure and holy and loves to do God's will (*"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,"* (Romans 7:22, ESV). These two natures are totally different in their essence. They hate each other. This is the conflict Paul spoke of when he said, *"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."* (Galatians 5:17, ESV).

## **The New Mission**

Therefore from the moment we are saved to the moment we are received into glory we are to be about the business of killing sin. This means that whether you are a new Christian or a seasoned Christian, you are in a warfare that requires of you the defeat of indwelling sin. This new mission is described in various ways in our Bibles.

- Jesus called it "taking up your cross and following Him" (*"Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24, ESV). What is the cross we are to carry? Is it not the instrument of execution?;
- In some cases it is called "pursuing holiness" (*"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1, ESV); and
- It is often called walking in the Spirit (*"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:16, ESV)

## **Biblical Foundation**

The key text that obligates us to be about this activity is found in Romans 8:12-13. Let us take a moment to unpack it.

*<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> 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.*

The paragraph starts with "So then" or "Therefore". Therefore what? Paul has previously asserted that Christians are people who now live in the reign and realm of the Spirit. We no longer live under the demands and compulsions of the flesh. Salvation forever changed that. The Spirit of God now resides and presides within, *therefore ...* .

*Brothers,* (The NIV gets it right. It is right to use inclusive language: *brothers and sisters*) *we are debtors not to the flesh.* There is absolutely no reason why we need to think that we must obey our sinful passions. Why? Verse 13 starts with the word "for". To live by the demands and the dictates of the flesh is certain death; not physical death, eternal death.

Paul doesn't say it but he assumes it: we are not obligated to live by the demands of the flesh; but yes, we are obligated to live by the demands of the Spirit. In verse 14 he will say that to live this way in fact shows you are a child of God. So those who live following the dictates of the flesh, the old nature will suffer eternal death, but those who live by the Spirit – those who kill the desires of the flesh through the power of the Spirit will have eternal life.

It is critical that you and I perform this execution by the Spirit. As John Owen affirms, "Mortification using our own strength, or carried on by ways that we invent, to make ourselves righteous in our own eyes, is the core of every false religion in the world. And this is the second principle of my ensuing discourse."<sup>2</sup>

Let me point out 3 things that this paragraph teaches us:

1. There are two ways to live life: One, by following your own desires and wants; or Two, yielded to the Spirit.
2. The former leads to eternal damnation. The latter leads to eternal life.
3. The Holy Spirit and the Christian both have a role in this battle. You and I must kill sin; and we must kill sin by the Spirit.

## **Main Point →**

So here's the main point of this sermon: Each follower of Jesus Christ is not only expected, but commanded to become a fighter. Once we are saved we have a new mission. Our mission is to deliver death blows to sin in our lives. The question is, "How"?

- Well it is not good intentions.
- It is not a well-organized lifestyle or trying to be nice.
- It is not self-effort and personal discipline.

We kill sin, by the Spirit (NB: "but **if by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body."<sup>3</sup>). How does the Spirit kill sin? Well, the Spirit kills sin with a sword. In Paul's teaching in Ephesians 6 on spiritual warfare he notes that the Holy Spirit has one clear offensive weapon. He writes, "*And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*" (Ephesians 6:17, ESV).

For example, how did Jesus defeat the Tempter in the wilderness? He used the "sword of the Spirit". ". . . But he answered, "It is written . . . Jesus said to him, "Again it is written . . . Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written . . ." (Matthew 4:1–11, ESV).

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<sup>2</sup> John Owen. Mortification of Sin (Kindle Locations 499-501). On the Wing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 8:13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

## Summary

**Those that live by the Spirit will kill sin by the Spirit.** The Spirit's instrument of execution is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The famous preacher, D. L. Moody, said: "Sin will keep you from this Book or this Book will keep you from sin." We are to kill sin by the Spirit; and the Spirit's weapon of choice is the Bible, the Word of God. (Next week I want to teach us how to use the Bible as a sword.)

There is both a warning and a promise in this paragraph.

- A. The Warning. This paragraph contains a severe warning to those who think, "I'm a Christian. I'm saved. I can live anyway I want. I don't have to be concerned about sin. I'm eternally secure." If Paul were here he would say "God, forbid." That is impossible for a genuine believer to think that way.

We are to use the Spirit to "put to death" the continuing sinful patterns of behavior from the old life. Only as we do will we have confidence that we are saved. The true Christian never makes peace with sin. Sin is always seen as an enemy to be killed.

- B. The Promise.

But there is a promise. If you live to satisfy the flesh you will die – eternally. If you live to satisfy the Spirit by putting to death sin, by the Spirit, you will live – live eternally. John Owen rightly affirms that "the vitality, power, and comfort of our spiritual life depend on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh."<sup>4</sup>

## Application

How does a person live each day on a "search and destroy mission"? Let me offer some practical advice:

1. Start each day with Bible reading/devotions/etc. We are instructed that "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*" (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV). This tells me that with the Holy Spirit's help our Bible reading will bring to the surface areas in our lives that need correction. It is the wise person that sets the Bible before them and prays, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!*" (Psalm 139:23, ESV).
2. We are inundated in our country by God's grace with good Bible teaching on TV, radio and the Internet. We seek in our church to provide the same in our gatherings. We can be impressed with the delivery of a sermon or teaching; we can even be excited about the information we

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<sup>4</sup> John Owen. Mortification of Sin (Kindle Locations 551-552). On the Wing. Kindle Edition.

have gained; but we should also be seeking correction. Many times we come under the teaching and preaching of God's Word and critique the Word instead of letting the Word critique us. Let us not let that happen. Let us be ". . . *doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" (James 1:22, ESV)

3. A third way to remain in the state of vigilance might surprise you. There's an old saying that when you point your finger at others, there are 3 pointing back at you. That is not just an old wives tale. When we see a twig in the life of another, should we not also consider the beam in our life? "*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*" (Matthew 7:3, ESV)

Has God spoken to you today? Perhaps you have ignored the fact that you are in a battle? Maybe you have made peace with some respectable sins in your life? Maybe you are diligent to live a godly life – by your own intuition and self-discipline? The net result is that it has filled you with pride! Maybe the "sword of the Spirit" has lost its edge? Maybe you leave it dusty on your shelf? Maybe sermons tickle your fancy instead of expose your sin?

Will you accept your new mission? "<sup>1</sup>. . . let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith . . ."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 12:1–2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.