

# THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 20 The Spirit Cleansing

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## Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 20

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 experimental purging, certain distinctions need to be drawn in order to a clearer understanding. Here, the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause, the blood of Christ is the meritorious and procuring cause, faith's appropriation of the Word is the instrumental cause. 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 moved to betake ourselves unto that "fountain" which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. 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. All of which is preceded by His work of regeneration whereby He capacitates the soul to see light in God's light and appropriate the provisions of His wondrous mercy. It is now our purpose to trace out the various aspects of the Spirit's work in purging the souls of believers, for we do not wish to anticipate too much the ground we hope to yet cover in our articles upon "Sanctification," yet this present topic would be incomplete were we to pass by this important phase of the Spirit's operations. We shall therefore restrict ourselves unto a single branch of the subject, which is sufficiently comprehensive as to include in it all that we now feel led to say thereon, namely, that of mortification. Nor shall we attempt to discuss in detail the varied ramifications of this important Truth, for if we are spared we hope some day ere very long to devote a series of articles to its separate consideration, for it is far too weighty and urgent to be dismissed with this brief notice of it. "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" (Rom. 8:13). A most solemn and searching verse is this, and one which we greatly fear has very little place in present-day preaching. Five things in it claim attention. First, the persons addressed. Second, the awful warning here set before them. Third, the duty enjoined upon them. Fourth, the efficient Helper provided. Fifth, the promise made. Those here addressed are regenerated believers, Christians, as is evident from the whole context: the Apostle denominates them "brethren" (v. 12). The Awful Warning Our text, then, belongs to the Lord's own people, who "are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh" (Rom. 8:12); rather are they "debtors" to Christ (who redeemed them) to live for His glory, "debtors" to the Holy Spirit (who

regenerated them) to submit themselves to His absolute control. But if an apprehension of their high privilege (to please their Savior) and a sense of their bounded duty (to Him who has brought them from death unto life) fail to move them unto godly living, perhaps an apprehension of their awful danger may influence them thereto: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die"—die spiritually, die eternally, for "life" and "death" in Romans always signifies far more than natural life and death. Moreover, to restrict "ye shall die" to physical dissolution would be quite pointless, for that experience is shared by sinners and saints alike. 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, which is in view. To "live after 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 after the flesh" is to be in love with sin, to serve it contentedly, to make self-gratification the trade and business of life. It is by no means limited to the grosser forms of wickedness and crime, but includes as well the refinement, morality, and religiousness of the best of men, who yet give God no real place in their hearts and lives. And the wages of sin is death. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall 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: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7, 8). 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. "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her" (Rev. 18:7)—so much as the flesh is gratified, so much is the soul endangered. Will you, my reader, for a little temporal satisfaction run the hazard of God's eternal wrath? Heed this solemn warning, fellow-Christian: God means what He says, "IF ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." The Duty to Mortify Sin Let us now consider the duty which is here enjoined—"do mortify the deeds of the body." In this clause, "the body" is the same as "the flesh" in the previous one, they are equivalent terms for the corruption of nature. The emphasis is here placed upon the body because it is the tendency of in-dwelling 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. Thus, the task which is here assigned the Christian is to "mortify" or put to death the solicitations to evil within him. The life of sin and the life of grace are utterly inconsistent and repellent: we must die to sin in order to live unto God. Now there is a threefold power in sin unto which we must die. First, its damning or condemning power, whereby it brings the soul under the wrath of God. This power it has from the Law, for "the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). But, blessed be God, the sentence of the Divine Law is no longer in force against the believer, for that was executed and exhausted upon the head of his Surety: consequently, "we are delivered from the law" (Rom. 7:6). Though sin may still hale Christians before God, accuse them before Him, terrify the conscience and make them acknowledge their guilt, yet it cannot drag them to Hell or adjudge them to eternal wrath. Thus, by faith in Christ sin is "mortified" or put to death as to its condemning power (John 5:24). Second, sin has a ruling and reigning power, whereby it keeps the soul under wretched slavery and continual bondage. This reign of sin consists not in the multitude, greatness, or prevalence of sin, for all those are consistent with a state of grace, and may be in a child of God, in whom sin does not and cannot reign. 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 its tyranny. Our conscious enjoyment of this is dependent, mainly, upon our obedience to Romans 6:11. 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 reigns not 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: to "mortify" it, to struggle against its inclinations and deny its solicitations, to make no provision for it, to walk in the Spirit so that he fulfill not the lusts of the flesh. 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, thank God, 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" (1 John 4:4). It is only "through the Spirit" we can, in any measure, successfully "mortify the deeds of the body." True Mortification Though the real Christian has been delivered from condemnation and freed from the reigning power of sin, yet there is a continual need for him to "mortify" or put to death the principle and actings of indwelling corruption. His main fight is against allowing sin to bring him into captivity to the lusts of the flesh. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness"—enter into no truce, form no alliance with—"but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). Say with Ephraim of old, "What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hosea 14:8). No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified. Allowed sin draws the heart from God, entangles the affections, discomposes the soul, and provokes God to close His ears against our prayers: see Ezekiel 14:3. Now it is most important that we should distinguish between mock mortification and true, between the counterfeit resemblances of this duty and the duty itself. There is a pagan "mortification," which 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. It is not a recovering of the soul from the world unto God, but only acquiring a fitness to live with less scandal among men. There is a Popish and superstitious "mortification," which consists in the neglect of the body, abstaining from marriage, certain kinds of meat, and apparel. Such things have "a show of wisdom" and are highly regarded by the carnal world, but not being commanded by God they have no spiritual value whatsoever. They macerate the natural man instead of mortifying the old man. There is also a Protestant "mortification" which differs nothing in principle from the Popish: certain fanatics eschew some of God's creatures; others demand abstinence when God requires temperance. True mortification consists, first, in weakening sin's root and principle. 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. One in a high fever cannot expect to lower his temperature while he continues to

eat heartily, nor can the lusts of the flesh be weakened so long as we feed or "make provision for" them. 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 actings: "denying ungodliness," etc. (Titus 2:12). Our Helper Though grace be wrought in the hearts of the regenerate, it is not in their power to act it: He who implanted it must renew, excite, and marshal it. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify" (Rom. 8:13). First, He it is who discovers the sin that is to be mortified, opening it to the view of the soul, stripping it of its deceits, exposing its deformity. Second, He it is who gradually weakens sin's power, acting as "the Spirit of burning" (Isa. 4:4), consuming the dross. Third, He it is who reveals and applies the efficacy of the Cross of Christ, in which there is contained a sin-mortifying virtue, whereby we are "made conformable unto His death" (Phil. 3:10). Fourth, He it is 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. 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 work in us, nothing can amount to true mortification. Yet note well it is not, "If the Spirit do mortify," nor even, "If the Spirit through you do mortify," but, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify"! The Christian is not passive, but active in this work. We are bidden to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 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). Paul could say, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 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 a cipher 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, though it relaxes us not 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. O my reader, 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 godless 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 our feeble powers. It is only "through the Spirit" that any of us can acceptably and effectually (in any degree) "mortify the deeds of the body." He it is who works in us a loathing of sin, a mourning over it, a turning away from it. He it is who presses upon us the claims of Christ, reminding us that inasmuch as He died for sin, we must spare no efforts to die to sin—"striving against sin" (Heb. 12:4), confessing it (1 John 1:9), forsaking it (Prov. 28:13). He it is who preserves us from giving way to despair, and encourages us to renew the conflict, assuring us that ultimately we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. He it is who deepens our aspirations after holiness, causing us to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10), and moving us to "forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13). The Promise "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Here is the encouraging promise set before the sorely-tried contestant. God will be no man's debtor: He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). If, then, by grace, we deny the flesh and cooperate with the Spirit, if we strive against sin and strive after holiness, richly shall we be recompensed. To say that Christians are unable to concur with the Spirit is to deny there is any real difference between the renewed and those who are dead in sin. It is true that without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), yet

it is equally true (though far less frequently quoted) that "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Mortification and vivification are inseparable: dying to sin and living unto God are indissolubly connected: the one cannot be without the other. If we through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, then, but only then, we shall "live"—live a life of grace and comfort here, and live a life of eternal glory and bliss hereafter. Some have a difficulty here in that Romans 8:13 conditions "life" upon our performance of the duty of mortification. "In the Gospel there are promises of life upon the condition of our obedience. The promises are not made to the work, but to the worker, and to the worker not for his work, but for Christ's sake according to his work. As for example, promise of life is made not to the work of mortification, but to him that mortifieth the flesh, and that not for his mortification, but because he is in Christ, and his mortification is the token or evidence thereof And therefore it must be remembered that all promises of the Gospel that mention works include in them reconciliation with God in Christ" (W. Perkins, 1604). The conditionality of the promise, then, is neither that of causation or uncertainty, but of coherence and connection, or means and end. The Highway of Holiness is the only path that leads to Heaven: "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8). But let it be pointed out that the sowing of a field with grain is not accomplished in a few minutes, it is a lengthy and laborious task, calling for diligence and patience. So it is with the Christian: mortification is a lifelong task. A neglected garden is neither easily nor quickly rid of weeds and much care is required for the cultivation of herbs and flowers. Nor is a long-neglected heart, with its indwelling corruptions and powerful lusts, brought into subjection to the Spirit by a few spasmodic efforts and prayers. It calls for painful and protracted effort, the daily denying of self, application of the principles of the Cross to our daily walk, earnest supplication for the Spirit's help. So "Be not weary" (Gal. 6:9). In conclusion let us seek to meet the objection of the discouraged Christian. "If a true mortification must be not only a striving against the motions of inward corruptions, but also the weakening of its roots, then I fear that all my endeavors have been in vain. Some success I have obtained against the outbreakings of lust, but still I find the temptation of it as strong as ever. I perceive no decays in it, but rather does it grow more violent each day." Answer, "That is because you are more conscious and take more notice of corruption than formerly. When the heart is made tender by a long exercise of mortification, a small temptation troubles it more than a greater one did formerly. This seeming strengthening of corruption is not a sign that sin is not dying, but rather an evidence that you are spiritually alive and more sensible of its motions" (condensed from Ezekiel Hopkins, 1680, to whom we are indebted for several leading thoughts in the first part of this chapter).

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