

# Holiness: Its Nature, Part 3

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In a real sense, each message in this series is built upon the content of the previous message. And if you're here for the first time, there's a sense in which you'll have to hang everything on a skyhook because you've not been present to feel something of the cumulative effect of the previous expositions. However, I trust that you will not feel totally lost, but that there will be substantial content in the message complete in itself.

Having dealt with the necessity of holiness, and then moving on to the nature of holiness or Biblical sanctification viewed in its three dimensions (sanctification begun, continued, and completed), we then addressed ourselves to some cardinal perspectives relative to the nurture of sanctification, particularly in its progressive dimension. And what I propose to do tonight is to continue to amplify one aspect of progressive sanctification. If you've been listening carefully (and from the looks of many of your faces, I believe you have been doing that), you have noted that I have continually made reference to the fact that the process of sanctification has both a negative and a positive dimension. Negatively, there is the mortification of remaining sin. Positively, there is conformity to the image of Christ in terms of the cultivation of Christ-like graces. I want to speak to that negative aspect tonight and try to glean from the Word of God some principles that I trust will be of help to us in this great Biblical duty of mortifying or putting to death the deeds of the flesh. And the two key texts which set this duty before us are Romans 8:13 and the Colossians 3:5.

"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." And then we have the statement, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." This indicates in its context that being led by the Spirit in no little measure finds expression in putting to death by the Spirit the deeds of the body. And then in Colossians 3, we have a similar exhortation from the pen of the Apostle. Having reminded the Colossians believers of their great privileges by virtue of union with Christ, he then draws a deduction from that great privilege and says in verse 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." And so the duty of the mortification of sin is a duty which is laid upon all believers. There is no believer so advanced in grace who does not stand under solemn obligations with respect to the duty of mortification.

Furthermore, with most believers, some of the most critical problems in the process of sanctification arise from an inability to make any progress in the mortification of specific sins often dubbed our besetting sins. And it is our failure to make progress in those particular sins which cause us many times to go about, as it were, limping spiritually because our consciences smite us. Our spirits, as it were, feel the defilement of those particular sins. Our boldness in prayer is hampered. Our

confidence in witness is often in great measure hindered because we are not making the progress we know we ought to make in dealing with certain areas of chronic failure which we know ought to yield to the progressive sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Those areas that can be likened to some of those pockets of resistance.

In some of the islands of the Pacific during the second World War (now I'm really dating myself by quoting such things, but nonetheless it was true), after the American troops had occupied certain islands, it was weeks or months before they could rid themselves of the plague of some of the enemy who had entrenched themselves in pillboxes and literally had to be burned out with flamethrowers. And so it is in our lives, even though we are very conscious that God in grace has broken the dominion of sin, and has raised the flag of conquest in our hearts, and has put us on the way of progressive sanctification. It seemed as though certain areas of sin had found a pillbox, often constructed of something that inheres in our constitutional makeup; often constructed of the formative influences of our early years and particular associations in life. But whatever the material, there in that pill box, there is an element of carnality, a deed of the flesh, an element that is contrary to the standard of God, and it seems to stand and mock us because of our inability to make progress in putting it to death.

Now unless there is something in the graciousness of Southern culture and in the peculiarity of Southern air which radically influences those realities, then you are already in your heart saying, "Pastor Martin, you're talking about me. I know what it is to have those pockets of resistance. And I long by the grace of God to make progress that hitherto I have never known." Well, my purpose tonight, under the blessing of God, is to try to set before you from the Scriptures some perspectives which if implemented by the enablement of the Spirit, may help you in the mortification of sin.

But then I have a second purpose in the way in which I am presenting material. I want to make you all--I was going to use the word "junkies," but that's too bad a term--but I do want to get you hooked on Owen. And I want to give you some choice quotes from Owen, Volume 6 that I hope will act as some well-chosen hors d'oeuvres after you haven't eaten for five or six hours, and will simply get all of your juices flowing and just make you anxious for the main course to be brought on. So I have that twofold end in view, and since this is a conference, and I do not regard the format of these lectures/sermons, whatever else you want to call them as being subject to the more normal and accepted standard of homiletics. I have no reservations whatsoever in telling you that that is my goal. And my method will be to quote quite frequently choice paragraphs out of Owen, something I would not normally do in an ordinary service of worship.

Well, then, if we are to make progress in this whole matter of the mortification of sin, let me say first of all, we must be in the proper context and have the proper tools. And according to both of these texts, unless we are in vital union with Jesus Christ, we are not in the context in which the mortification of sin is possible. It is only the regenerate man or woman who has the tools to mortify sin. The Apostle says in Romans 8:13, "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." And it is only if you are indwelt by the Spirit and thereby vitally joined to Jesus Christ, so that out of the virtue of Christ and all of those redemptive privileges that are in Him, that you can make progress in this

work. Unless you are in Him, then you cannot make any true progress in Biblical mortification. Or in the terms of the Colossians 3 passage, it is only those who have been raised together with Christ and are seated with Christ, whose life is hid with Christ in God who are commanded, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth."

So if I speak tonight to men or women, boys or girls who know nothing of being vitally joined to Jesus Christ--you have a head full of notions about the Son of God and His salvation, but your heart is devoid of any true actings of repentance and faith--let me urge you at the outset to consider that you cannot make any true progress in dealing with the very sins that will damn you and destroy you until you first of all flee to that fountain open to sin and uncleanness and embrace "[that] faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." But now, assuming--and I trust it is not baseless presumption--that many if not most of you are in union with Christ, let us then proceed to consider some of those principles that must be operative if we are to make progress in the mortification of sin.

Principle number one is this (and here, those of you who are familiar with Owen will recognize a ring of Owen's language): we must keep the heart well-supplied with Gospel motives. Now, when I use the term Gospel motives, I mean motives that derive from a believing enjoyment of the privileges of the Gospel as opposed to mere legal motives; that is, motives that pertain to God's rights as lawgiver and the results of defying those rights. Legal principles and motives would be such as pertain to the danger of apostasy and the pains of hell. But Gospel motives are those motives that are attached to a believing reception of the good news of salvation in Christ (His love to us, and in turn, our love to Him), such motives as are reflected in the language of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14 in which he says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us...." Christ's love to me, understood in some dimension by the illumination of the Spirit and believingly received into the heart, acts as a holy constraint upon the great Apostle.

The Apostle mentions similar motivation in Philippians 1 in that well-known text: "For to me to live is Christ...." Or in Philippians 3 where he outlines his great spiritual ambitions in the words, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings...." It is those perspectives and motives that derive directly from the great realities of God's salvation in Jesus Christ which are the most powerful incentives to the killing of our sin.

Jesus said, "If a man love Me, he will keep My commandments." Not only is it God's love in Christ that forms part of that complex of redemptive motivation, it is to be found in the reality of the gift of the Spirit. When Paul is dealing with the tacky problem of immorality at Corinth, you'll notice how he plants this doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit right in the middle of his treatment of the sordid sin of fornication. He says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...?" He introduces the doctrine of union with Christ. He says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid." You see what he's doing? He's seeking to arm the Corinthians with Gospel principles and motives in their warfare against the sin of fornication. He does not hold over them in that context the frightening possibility dealt with earlier, that anyone who continues in a course of

immorality has no right to claim he's a member of the kingdom of God. But he presses Gospel motives upon their consciences.

Men are able to step over legal motives day after day in the pursuit of their sins. But in the language of John Newton, it's when a bleeding Savior we have viewed that then we hate our sins. And if you and I are to make progress in the mortification of our sins, the putting to death the deeds of the body, we must guard our hearts in the language of Proverbs 4:23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And we must guard our hearts to make sure that they are kept, as it were, pulsating with Gospel motives and with those great principles that flow out of the privileges that are ours in Jesus Christ.

Now if we are convinced of that truth, then it will have a twofold practical influence upon our lives. On the one hand, we will take seriously every public and private means ordained of God to keep Gospel motives fresh and burning in our hearts. What are the means God has ordained to keep Gospel motives burning in our hearts? Well, there are the private means of secret prayer; the secret, private reflective reading of the Word of God. There are the public means of coming to the fellowship of God's people and the proclamation of His Word, and coming to His table where again and again what is set before us: "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come."

Our Lord knew that to the extent that Gospel motives permeated our hearts, to that extent, and to that extent alone, would we walk well-pleasing in His sight. And so, if you and I are determined to obey the command of God to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and if we are convinced that it is only in the context of the heart feeling the weight and pressure as well as the joy of Gospel motives which becomes the spring of obedience in this duty, then we will be very persnickety about private and public means of grace. We will be willing to be called pietistic when we feel twinges of conscience about secret prayer that has been missed for a day.

It's become very popular in many reformed circles in which I move (and when people begin to understand the liberty that is theirs in Christ, and that we do not live by man's rules which say you must have a halve house quiet time and all the rest) to have a very cavalier attitude to the matter of the private means of grace. But when you realize that it is ordained of God that secret prayer should be the context in which the Lord Himself draws nigh to us in a peculiar way as we draw near to Him (and that's Biblical language), then you will allow your consciences to become sensitive about consistency in the secret place. Because the man, woman, boy, or girl who is insensitive to that means of grace by degrees will find Gospel realities and Gospel motives slipping away from the center of his/her heart. We will be careful about the public means of grace where the blessings of the new covenant in Christ are announced and reiterated in preaching and prayer week by week as we are brought back again and again to the central issues of the Gospel.

Then the second practical effect this will have is this: it will cause us to beware of anything which bleeds off the vigor and reality of Gospel principles from our hearts. There may be certain associations, certain television programs, certain forms of conversation that are not sinful in themselves. But if you find they make Christ less precious, the blood of His covenant less dear, the reality of His claims over you less vigorous, you'll avoid those things as much as you'll avoid those things that are

patently and obviously wicked even in the eyes of the unconverted. Why? Because you are determined to make progress in this matter of putting to death the deeds of the flesh. And you know that you cannot and will not make progress unless your heart is well-furnished with Gospel motives, feeling constantly the wonder of His love to you in Christ; feeling the amazement in the language of Ephesians 4, that the Holy Spirit indwells you, and you are sealed unto the day of redemption. That text comes right in the midst of an exhortation to put off the petty kinds of sins that wreck and ruin and split churches and drive pastors to early graves. He's speaking of wrangling and anger and bitterness and unforgiveness. And in the midst of that he says, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"--Gospel motives!

You will find all the way through the New Testament in the most vigorously ethical passages out leap these tremendous statements of Gospel privilege. I underscored that with regard to those two statements in Titus 2:11-14 and 3:5-7. Right in the midst of one of the most practical and ethical portions of all the Word of God--what is Paul doing? He's arming them to deal with these matters in terms of Gospel motives and Gospel principles.

But then there is a second exhortation I would give you if you would make progress in this matter, and it is this: keep your conscience sensitive to the guilt and danger of your own specific sins. The battle against remaining sin is difficult enough when you're looking your enemies square in the eye and you know they are your enemies. But if you begin to look upon them as mere neutral observers or even your friends, the battle is lost.

As long as you're facing that spirit of envy--and in a group this size, surely there's a man or woman whose besetting sin is envy or jealousy, sins that are not placard before the community when you indulge them, not like immorality, not like thievery, not like drunkenness, but sins that God puts in the same list with thievery, drunkenness, lechery, and every form of sexual impurity. You wrestle with that matter of envy and jealousy; you can't rejoice in the gifts God gives to others; you cannot with joy abandon yourself in praise to God when you see His blessing falling upon another in a way in which it has not fallen upon you. How in the world are you going to make progress? Well, my friend, as long as you're looking at your envy straight in the eye and calling it what it is, dealing with it in terms of what God calls it, and seeking to bring your conscience to feel continually both the guilt and the danger of that sin, you're in a position to make progress in dealing with it. The minute you begin to rationalize, and envy is no longer that green wicked monster, which God says is conceived in hell itself, and you begin to look at it as some rather indistinct, nondescript passer-by who happens once in a while to pop up and say, "hello" in your heart, you'll not make any progress. If you suddenly felt an impulse to fornicate with your neighbor's husband, as a Godly wife, I trust, the first thought of that would cause you to be filled with horror. Until you begin to treat envy the same way, you won't make any progress in dealing with it.

You say, "Well, Pastor Martin, how do we bring the conscience to that point of being sensitive concerning the guilt and danger of our specific sins? Owen's counsel is wise and Biblical. We do it in two ways: bring that sin to the law in all of its purity, and bring it to the Gospel in all of its glory. Bring that sin to the law in all of its purity. What is the God-ordained function of the law? Well, let the Apostle Paul tell us as he

speaks to Timothy who has to charge certain men not to misuse the law. And here God overrules heresy to bring out positive teaching. We read in 1 Timothy 1:3-11,

"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man [when you find a perfectly righteous man, one who perfectly meets the standard of righteousness set by God, the law has no function with respect to exposing him], but for the lawless and disobedient [he starts on the out perimeter of what we would call blatant obvious sins], for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

You see what he says? The law is ordained of God to expose sin as sin wherever sin is present, all the way from the gross sins of the unregenerate Gentiles to the refined sins of Gospel hearers. And therefore, it is our duty as the people of God to bring our sins to the blazing light of that law which is holy and spiritual and good, because it reflects the unchanging character of Him who is holy and spiritual and good in His very essence. John Owen, speaking to this very issue, says on page 57 of his treatise on the subject of mortification (words that pointedly underscore this very principle), "This is the proper work of the law: to discover sin in the guilt of it, and to awake and humble the soul for it, to be a glass to represent sin's colors. [Now note.] And if thou deniest to deal with it on this account, it is not through faith but through the hardness of thy heart and the deceitfulness of sin." In his day, there were those who said, "O no, come to the faith of the Gospel. The law has no more function with me." Owen, as a wise pastor (and remember, these treatises were not concocted for the professors at large, but for pleading hungry sheep as a pastor preaches) says,

"This is a door that too many professors have gone out at unto open apostasy. Such a deliverance from the law they have pretended, as that they would consult with its guidance and direction no more; they would measure their sin by it no more. By little and little this principle hath insensibly, from the notion of it, proceeded to influence their practical judgments, and having taken possession there, hath turned the will and affections loose to all manner of abominations."

We must seek to bring our sins to the light of the law in all of its purity. Have you gotten beyond periodically reading the Sermon on the Mount with a view that you would see your own besetting sins in the light of our Lord's searching exposition of the full intent of the holy law of God. No wonder you're not making progress. Because your conscience is not pressured with a sense of the guilt of that sin as contrary to the holiness and righteousness of God as reflected in His own holy law.

But you must not stop there. You must bring your sin to the Gospel in all of its glory. And what do I mean by that? Simply this: bring that particular sin--I mentioned the sin of envy; let's stick with it--bring that envy to Gethsemane. And then meditate upon that passage in which our Lord sees that cup and what's presented in that cup, and He cries out, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." What was the cup? It was that cup full of the fury of the Almighty against the sins of His people, a cup that could not pass until He drained the last dark drop. Gaze upon that cup. See your envy as part of its conflict. See your envy pressing sweat drops from His holy brow. See your envy causing Him to stagger like a drunken man until He falls to the earth, and God must send an angel to strengthen Him. March with your envy to Pilot's judgment hall. Behold it in His spattered dignity. Behold it in the shrouded heaven. Listen to your envy when it echoes with the piercing cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Now will you bring your envy to the glory of the Gospel; to the agonies and sufferings of Christ and to the wonder that He forever put away all of our sins? If your conscience cannot be made sensitive to the danger and guilt of your sins in the blazing light of those realities, my friend, you are in a frightening posture. You and I must constantly seek the conscience sensitive to the greatness and the danger of our own specific sins. Behold their guilt in the light and the purity of the law and the glory of the Gospel.

But what is the great danger of those sins that remain as pockets of resistance, and we seem to make so little progress in their mortification? There are great dangers in them. The first great danger is the danger of a hardened heart. Listen to the language of Hebrews 3, that book in which it is my own conviction that the warnings are not appendixes to the doctrine of instruction. But the doctrine of instruction is but the foundation of the great warnings which forms, as it were, the pinnacle of the pastoral burden of this letter. And we read in verses 12 and 13 these very searching words: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

And then as though someone says in a cavalier way, "Well, so what if I'm hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? Once in grace, always in grace." And then one of the most powerful statements of perseverance follows. Look at verse 14: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." And no man can hold firmly to the confidence of an acceptance in Christ who by degrees gives himself over to hardness of heart. Gospel faith and free pardon are always joined to Gospel efforts to progressive sanctification. And no little part in that process is avoiding hardness of heart. Slight thoughts of sin will always be joined to slight thoughts of God, of Christ, and of the blood of the covenant; heaven and hell will become distant.... May God grant that we shall fear a hard heart above all else that we fear.

And there is, of course, the danger of temporal correction from the Lord if we do not deal with those sins. Psalm 89:30-33 or the New Testament parallel in 1 Corinthians 11: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." People have from time to time said to my wife, "Mrs. Martin, how can you let your husband go off to speak here and there...." You know what her stock answer is? She says, "Look, he's the Lord's property, and if I ever mess around with that, I fear what God will do to me." I thank God for a wife who has that perspective. She says, "I have enough fear of God's rod that I don't mess around with God's prophet." Now my responsibility is to be

sensitive to her needs, to nourish and cherish her, and to govern the time I'm away from home by my duties as a husband and a father. And I seek by God's grace to do that, though I'm sure my efforts are stained with sin and failure. But you see the principle? A wholesome fear of God's temporal chastisement keeps the conscience sensitive, not only to the guilt but to the dangers of your sin. There's a sense in which if you go on and indulge in that sin, you're provoking God to speak harshly by the law of correction.

Then the third great principle: if we would make progress in this matter of putting to death our remaining sin, we must not only keep the heart well-supplied with Gospel motives, keep the conscience sensitive to the guilt and danger of sin, but (and this sounds so obvious, but pastoral experience has taught me never to assume that people understand, or if they understand, remember the obvious) avoid the known occasions and provocations to your particular sins. Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

If you're allergic to feathers and to flowers; if they produce in you as they do in me a reaction of wheezing and sneezing and redness of eyes, you've have sense enough when you're speaking at your retreat not to enter into the pillow fights. And when the pillow fight starts, you know that you're going to have to sleep out in the back of your station wagon. Where pillows and feathers are, you aint. Now, anyone who has been an asthmatic and knows what it is wheeze and feel his heart pounding as he tries to suck in enough oxygen to exist, a pillow fight is not a lark to such a person. For the great principle applies experience.

If experience is so new that certain company, certain television programs, certain patterns of relationships and attitudes and actions leave you either particularly vulnerable to your sin or it inevitably leads you to commit your besetting sin, until you are serious about avoiding the known occasions and provocations to sin, your not serious about dealing with the sin itself. Here Owen again speaks with such pastoral insight: "He that dares to dally with occasions to sin will dare to sin. He that will venture upon temptations to wickedness will venture upon wickedness itself." Isn't the book of Proverbs full of this perspective? The writer of Proverbs speaks to his son and says, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." It's not an admonition to avoid wickedness. He says enter not into the very path of wickedness.

This is where the matter of holy violence that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 9 enters; where our Lord's vigorous teachings of the plucking out of right eyes and the cutting off of right hands enters. And in our soft, flabby age, it's so contrary to us. I've seen people moan and groan for years that they wasted too much time and that they were making so little progress in the use of their time. And when I questioned them, "What is it that erodes your valuable use of time?" They'd say, "It is my addiction to the television." I'd answer, "If you can't master it, get rid of it." And they'd put it in the closet. They cut off the right hand, but they hadn't cast it from them. They're waiting for the right opportunity to do a little reconnecting.

I venture to say in a group this size, there are some of you who simply do not have the necessary discipline essential to govern the television set; to say at the end of the week, "O God, this instrument has been used to Your glory and to Your glory alone. And for this, I give You thanks. In the Savior's name, amen." If you possess a television, you ought to be able to do that at the end of any week. And if you cannot

so govern its use as to do that, get rid of it. "But I won't be up-to-date on the news." Who cares. It's so biased and slanted by the television media (what your getting) there's not much of it fact anyway. There are other ways to accumulate information that will keep you in touch with the real world. I'm not advocating monastic retreat. But I am advocating that there's something more important than being known as Mr. up-to-date-on-the-news man. And that more important issue is the issue of putting to death the inordinate and unwise indulgence of time in watching the television.

Now don't anyone make the mistake that because I made specific application to envy and TV, those are the two great sins. No, no, please, I'm only making specific application of the principles because if I don't, it's seldom that the people of God will make any specific application.

You must avoid the known occasions and provocations to sin. Some of you have a quick temper. God gave you a short fuse, and you're like certain firearms that I've fired. As I was coming up on the target and just beginning to squeeze--pow! off they went--a very hair-precious trigger. Well, God put some of you together that way. And you know what provokes you to unusual vulnerability? When you don't get your full allotment of sleep. Well, knowing that, my friend, you've got to exercise the discipline of adequate adjustment of your schedule to get sufficient rest. And no amount of praying and fasting and crying to God for deliverance from these outbursts of passion is going to be a substitute for holy watchfulness with regard to your sleep schedule.

For some of you, your biggest downfall is that little instrument that is attached to the wall. Up in our area, all of them are owned by Bell Telephone Company. More sin has been committed by many a church member by means of a telephone than all the whore houses in the county; than all the sin mills in the county, especially when you've got a long cord on your phone, and you can carry on all your housework while gabbing for three hours.

You called up so and so; you had a good reason to do so, to discuss a certain item. Your business was over in a minute and a half, but you felt embarrassed simply to say, "Well, Jane, that's all I wanted to say," or "Well, Mary, that's all I have to say. We look forward to seeing you in church on the Lord's Day." And you just began to ramble, and from rambling, there was, "Did you here?" And from the "Did you hear?" there was downright slander and gossip and blatant violation of the 9th commandment. You picked up false witness; you propagated false witness. You were blatantly and openly violating the 9th commandment 10, 15, 20, 30, 40 minutes. And when you were done, you felt dirty--dirty!

For years you had become a garbage can for gossip. And your tongue had become the instrument that it poured the same into your friend's ears. And your heart was smitten, and you asked the Lord to forgive you, and you asked your sister and your brother in the Lord to forgive you. But what did you do? Next week almost the same time, the same place, and the same circumstances, you did it again.

Well, if you see a pattern, you go to that sister or brother and say, "Look, my telephone conversations with you are the occasion of sin, and this must stop. I'm too weak to enter into general conversation with you. Would you please not think ill of me if when we talk on the phone, I seem to be abrupt in cutting off the conversation." You say, "Pastor Martin, that's ridiculous." Not if you're seeking to be

holy and by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh, avoiding the known occasions and provocations to sin.

In a group this size, I'd be willing to bet (and the odds, I bet, would be pretty high) there are men who are addicted to pornography in the state of that filth that is in every public place. And again, out of pastoral experience, I would be greatly surprised if someone's heart is not beating faster, and he feels the redness creeping up the back of his neck. "Honey, I'm just going down to the drugstore to get some toothpaste." It's strange how you always make your way by the magazine rack, O not to buy, but just to look long enough to know how terrible it is, so when you preach about it, you can preach with conviction.... You're thumbing through those magazines because they answer to something base in your own corruption. And you'll not make any progress in mortifying that sin until you avoid the known occasions of sin. You don't go to the drugstore alone. You take one of your kids with you. You say, "That's ridiculous." Not if you're determined to be a holy man.

Avoid the known occasions and provocations to sin, or you'll violate the Biblical commandment to watch as well as to pray. Or in the language of 1 Corinthians 6, "Flee fornication." Paul doesn't say stand around and pray about it. And he uses the general word for sexual impurity. He says flee it. Sins of that nature you don't get close enough to begin to debate with them. Passion has never lost a debate yet. It will debate down the most powerful Gospel arguments. Don't ever enter into a debate with it. Be like a Joseph who at the first tangible expression of the overtures of any uncleanness runs.

Well, my time is gone. Let me just give you the two other headings I had hoped to open up, And if you get Owen, you get it all and much more. And I have no shares in the outfit that prints it. But let me give you two other principles. Strike at the first risings of sin. James 1:14 and 15 says, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Seek to prevent the conception. At the first approach of that which is seeking to enter into that unholy alliance with your own remaining sin, don't allow that embrace. When you do, there'll be conception. And when there's conception, there's birth. The whole analogy between conception and birth is prominent in the language of James in James 1. Strike at the first risings of sin, because there is no sin, which if it had its way, would not carry us to its ultimate expression. The first risings of anger would result in murder if it could.

And then the last principle: continually look to Christ for the killing of your sin. Ultimately it is the death of Christ alone that is the death to our sin. Be convinced that there is provision in the death of Christ, not only for the pardon of your sin, but for the conquering of that sin, for the putting to death of that sin. That's the great teaching we saw today of Romans 6. And then constantly raise your eyes to expect deliverance from Christ and Christ alone. As we contemplated this afternoon, feed much upon the reality of His intercession and His advocacy and all of His gracious part in the process of sanctification. In the language of Hebrews 12, we are to lay aside every weight and sin which does so easily beset us all in the context of looking off unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

O, may God help us to implement with some degree of efficiency under the power of the Spirit these simple but basic principles, that we may, by the grace of God, make

progress in this great teaching of putting to death the deeds of the flesh. "Mortify thy members which are upon the earth." For we will make little progress in the cultivation of positive graces of Christ-likeness if there are these sins eating at the vitals of our spiritual life. May we look to Christ and draw from Him the necessary grace to make progress in this vital dimension of progressive sanctification.

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