**Romans 8:12-13**

**Town North Presbyterian Church – Rev. David J. Rogers**

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One of the greatest books of Western Literature was written about 700 years – titled:

***The Divine Comedy***.

It is an epic poem about the state of the human soul after death. In the poem **Dante Alighieri** describes various LEVELS of Hell with the DEEPEST levels reserved for the WORST.

There were three particular men were in the DEEPEST level of Hell:

Brutus, Cassius and Judas Iscariot.

These were three well-known TRAITORS. They won the trust of their friends – and then BETRAYED them from the INSIDE.

By putting these men in the DEEPEST level of Hell Dante was pointing out the terrible evil of a BETRAYER who worked on the INSIDE.

As followers of Jesus Christ we have a DEEP BETRAYER like this inside of us.

That DEEP BETRAYER is the SIN that still remains in us.

It is insidious and it is dangerous.

That is why God tells us we must track it down and KILL IT. That is what we are told in these verses.

As the well-known Puritan John Owen said:

“*Be KILLING sin or it will be KILLING you!*”

Paul begins by telling us we have an OBLIGATION to do this as followers of Christ.

That’s what we read at the beginning of **verse 12**:

“*So then, brothers, we are DEBTORS, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*.”

Notice Paul says we are DEBTORS.

A DEBTOR is someone who OWES something.

To be a DEBTOR means you are OBLIGATED to PAY something. You MUST do it.

It may be a FINANCIAL DEBT. You are OBLIGATED to pay back Wells Fargo Bank for the money they put up for your house. You OWE that money to the bank.

Or it may be a MORAL DEBT. That means it is an OBLIGATION to God. You are OBLIGATED to love your neighbor who was created in God’s image. You OWE it to God.

So when Paul says here “…*we are DEBTORS*…”– he means we have an OBLIGATION.

We have an OBLIGATION to LIVE in a certain way.

And notice he states this OBLIGATION in **NEGATIVE terms**.

He tells these believers what they are **NOT** OBLIGATED to do.

Notice he says:

“*So then, brothers, we are DEBTORS,* ***NOT******to the flesh***…”

In other words, as BELIEVERS in Jesus Christ –you are **NOT** OBLIGATED to the flesh.

You are NOT under OBLIGATION to live “…*according to the flesh* (sinful nature)*…*”!

You are **NOT** OBLIGATED to do what the sinful nature wants you to do.

You are **NOT** OBLIGATED to follow the sinful nature’s way.

You have **NO** OBLIGATION to do what the old sinful nature desires.

Paul doesn’t finish the thought – but IMPLIES a **POSITIVE** OBLIGATION.

In other words, **WE ARE** DEBTORS to the SPIRIT.

**WE ARE** OBLIGATED to live according to the SPIRIT.

WHY is that?

Paul has just told us why in the previous two chapters – and in this chapter.

As believers Jesus Christ bought us at a price!

Jesus Christ DIED for sins – and ROSE from the DEAD.

And the SPIRIT of GOD APPLIED His DEATH and NEW LIFE to us through BELIEVING in HIM.

We were BAPTIZED into Him. His DEATH KILLED SIN in us – and His LIFE is now at work in us by His Spirit.

As we saw in the previous verses last week – CHRIST LIVES IN US!

Jesus Christ has BOUGHT US at the price of His blood – and we are HIS! We now have HIM and His ETERNAL LIFE living in us. He LIVES IN US by His SPIRIT.

ALL THIS is the reason why **WE ARE** DEBTORS to LIVE according to the SPIRIT.

We are OBLIGATED to LIVE by the SPIRIT – because the SPIRIT of CHRIST LIVES IN US! We have an OBLIGATION to LIVE THIS WAY – because this is WHO WE ARE!

So Paul is telling believers we have an **OBLIGATION** to LIVE by the SPIRIT.

But WHAT does that mean? WHAT does it look like?

Notice Paul tells us what that looks like here in **verse 13**.

To LIVE by the SPIRIT means that “…*by the Spirit you* ***PUT TO DEATH*** *the deeds of the body*…”

We are to *PUT TO DEATH* the “…*deeds of the body*…”?

That is what we DO – as people who are OBLIGATED to LIVE by the SPIRIT.

We are OBLIGATED to *PUT TO DEATH* the “…*deeds of the body*…”

WHAT are the “*deeds of the body*”?

They are the deeds of the SINFUL NATURE.

In other words, all those DESIRES and DEEDS the SINFUL NATURE produces.

The words “*deeds of the body*” – describe the outward and final actions of sin. Every sin BEGINS with SINFUL DESIRE – but when it is fully grown it becomes a SINFUL DEED.

**Illus**: You can think of it this way.

SINFUL DESIRES are like SEEDS.

SINFUL DEEDS are like the FLOWER.

When SINFUL DESIRES are fully grown – they become into SINFUL DEEDS.

SINFUL DESIRES are still SIN. They just haven’t germinated yet.

So it seems Paul is using the words “…*deeds of the body*…” to describe the whole.

We know this when we read Paul’s other letters. In **Colossians** Paul says:

“*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry… you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.* ***9*** *Do not lie to one another*…”

Notice Paul says “*PUT to DEATH*” these things – and this list includes both **DESIRES** and **DEEDS**. He says PUT to DEATH: “*EVIL DESIRE*” – and “*COVETOUSNESS*” (which is DESIRING what belongs to someone else). These are **DESIRES**.

At the same time he says PUT to DEATH OBSCENE talk – and do not LIE. These are **DEEDS** that are done by the body.

So Paul tells believers to PUT to DEATH the DESIRES and DEEDS of the sin nature.

Another way to say it is that as believers must PUT SIN to DEATH.

**We are OBLIGATED – as people who live by the Spirit – to be KILLING SIN**.

The older English word used for KILL was MORTIFY. The Puritan pastor **John Owen** wrote a small book using this word which was titled “***The Mortification of Sin in Believers***.”

Owen based the whole book on this one verse: **Romans 8:13**.

He said the REASON why he wrote that small book was because he had seen many believers ensnared in SIN and unable to deal with temptations.

At the same time he saw many teachers make “*dangerous mistakes*” by teaching people they needed to KILL SIN – but these teachers were didn’t know the MYSTERY of the GOSPEL – and the EFFECTIVENESS of Christ’s DEATH.

So they taught people to KILL SIN by simply trying to use human strength and human will-power – and it only CRUSHED them with GUILT and ANXIETY.

And the same is true for us as believers today.

KILLING SIN is part of our daily calling as believers–because have SIN remaining in us.

We have CHRIST living in us – but we also have an ENEMY of SIN WITHIN.

So that ENEMY must PUT TO DEATH. And it requires our constant effort.

Do you see that part of your DAILY CALLING in Christ?

Do you know HOW to PUT SIN to DEATH?

Maybe those words are OPPRESSIVE to you.

Maybe you come from a Christian background where you heard all the time that you had to KILL SIN. You must STOP DOING BAD THINGS – and that was ALL you heard. So you constantly tried – and constantly failed – and it became OPPRESSIVE to you.

Then you heard the GOSPEL of CHRIST more clearly – and you felt JOY and FREEDOM for the first time. You felt FREEDOM from the OPPRESSION of constantly FAILING.

But you also see that you still need to KILL SIN – but you DON’T KNOW HOW.

Maybe no one has ever told you HOW.

Or maybe KILLING SIN is something you feel you’ve tried but have continually failed.

Maybe you used to try to KILL SIN – but it never seems to work.

So now you have simply called a “truce.” You are simply content where you are. You have called a “truce” with your sinful nature – because (frankly) you are just TIRED!

You have given up the fight – and learned to LIVE at your current level of sin.

And unfortunately, if we are NOT KILLING SIN – it will be KILLING US!

(That’s the way John Owen put it.)

If we don’t KILL SIN we SUFFER for it. We lose JOY and VIGOR and POWER as Christ’s people.

Or if we try to KILL SIN in the WRONG WAY we will also SUFFER for it. We become DISCOURAGED, DEPRESSED and DEFEATED.

If you feel any of this – you need to listen to these words again with FRESH EARS.

As a believer since Christ LIVES IN YOU – you have an OBLIGATION to KILL SIN.

This text tells you THREE important things you need to know for doing that.

FIRST, you must know WHAT to kill.

SECOND, you must know HOW to kill.

THIRD, you must know WHY to kill.

**MP1**: **You must know WHAT to kill** (13 – deeds of the body)

FIRST, you must know WHAT to KILL.

We see this in **verse 13**:

“*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*.”

Notice Paul tells these believers WHAT to KILL.

He tells them:

“…*put to death the* ***deeds of the body***…”

As I just mentioned, that means ALL the DESIRES and DEEDS of the sinful nature.

It is SIN at all levels – whether it’s a DESIRE, or a THOUGHT, or the actual DEED itself. It is SIN and ALL it’s workings in the human soul, mind, and body.

This raises a very important point for all of us as believers.

It means we must KNOW the ENEMY.

**Illus**: Back in 2003 – during the invasion of Iraq – the US military gave soldiers decks of playing cards. They weren’t just any playing cards – but they were “Personal Identification” playing cards. Each card had the picture of the most wanted members of Saddam Hussein’s government – and military leaders.

The [**ace of spades**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ace_of_spades) is [**Saddam Hussein**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saddam_Hussein). The **ace of diamonds** is Saddam's presidential secretary. And each of the 52 cards had a picture of an important person or leader.

Why did the US military give all the soldiers these playing cards?

The soldiers needed to KNOW the ENEMY!

The same thing is true for us as believers.

We need to KNOW the ENEMY – so we know WHAT to KILL.

You need to KNOW what your ENEMY of SIN looks like so you can KILL it.

**App**: So WHAT are YOUR SINS which need to be KILLED?

It seems like that would be EASY to answer.

But SIN isn’t always as easy to IDENTIFY in ourselves as you would think.

It’s a lot EASIER to IDENTIFY SINS in OTHERS than to IDENTIFY OUR OWN. Have you ever been listening to a sermon and think:

“*Wow!! I know who needs to hear this!*”

Or “*Wow…I hope my husband’s listening!*”

SIN in others often seems so glaringly OBVIOUS to us.

But it’s NOT always so easy to IDENTIFY OUR OWN.

The only way to really do it is to spend time EXAMINING God’s Word – and letting God’s Word EXAMINE YOU.

We need to know WHAT SIN looks like – and the only way to do that is to get to know GOD Himself – and what HE TELLS US is RIGHT and TRUE and GOOD. That’s why it’s important to read and meditate on God’s Word.

You can’t trust what everyone in the world tells you is RIGHT and TRUE and GOOD.

Instead, it’s important to be in a BODY of BELIEVERS – the CHURCH. It’s important to have TRUSTED fellow believers who are not afraid to talk frankly with you when there may be SIN that you do not see.

You need to be able to IDENTIFY SIN in your own heart and life.

If you are going to be KILLING SIN – you need to know WHAT to KILL!

And the SINS that lurk in your heart may CHANGE over the course of your life.

If you are a young child the SIN may be LYING.

When you are a teenager – or **in your 20’s** – the SIN may be LUST.

When you are in your **30’s & 40’s** the SIN may be SELFISH AMBITION or GREED.

When you are in your **50’s & 60’s** the SIN may be ANGER or APATHY.

When you are in your **70’s & 80’s** the SIN may be BITTERNESS or GRUMBLING.

The SINS you needed to KILL in your 20’s may not be the SINS you need to KILL in your 50’s.

Here’s the point:

You need to IDENTIFY the SINS you face – which you need to KILL – TODAY!

And they may not be the same as those you faced in the past.

You may need to KILL **BITTERNESS** – even though you never had it before.

Or you may need to KILL **ANXIETY** – even though you never had it before.

You may be losing abilities – or capacities – and it makes you BITTER. You need to start KILLING BITTERNESS – and FIGHTING for joy – even though you have never had to do that before in your life!

Many believers live in ignorance of the deep SIN that lies in their hearts.

They keep careful track of their RETIREMENT and INVESTMENTS are doing on Wall Street. They get frequent check-ups at the doctor. They watch what they eat and workout 3 or 4 times a week – so their bodies are finely tuned.

But many give LITTLE THOUGHT to their SOULS and KILLING SIN.

So FIRST, you must know WHAT to KILL.

**MP2**: **You must know HOW to kill** (13 – by the Spirit)

SECOND, you must know HOW to KILL.

This is probably the most important thing to know. And it is probably where it is easiest to go wrong.

Look again at **verse 13**.

“*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*.”

So HOW do you KILL SIN? How does it work, practically?

It’s important to know that you don’t always KILL SIN by a “*frontal attack*.”

There are DIFFERENT ways to KILL SIN just as there are different ways to kill a man.

**Illus**: A person may KILL another human being by using a weapon. Someone may KILL another person with a GUN or a KNIFE.

But there are other ways to KILL a person.

The commander of a prison camp may KILL a person by DEPRIVING him of what he needs to live.

The guards may KILL a person by DEPRIVING that person of FOOD and WATER.

The words here: “*PUT to DEATH*” – or KILL or MORTIFY a living thing – means to TAKE AWAY all of its STRENGTH and VIGOR it cannot act or exert influence on anything.

So think about what that means when it comes to SIN.

Paul is comparing your INDWELLING SIN to a LIVING PERSON. Sometimes he calls this living person as the “*OLD MAN*.”

This OLD MAN still has STRENGTH and VIGOR and CRAFTINESS – and THIS must be PUT to DEATH. It must be KILLED.

**App**: HOW do you do that?

You must TAKE AWAY it’s STRENGTH and VIGOR to act and exert influence.

You must TAKE AWAY all that it needs to LIVE.

So to KILL SIN means you seek to TAKE AWAY all that this particular SIN NEEDS to LIVE in your heart and exert its influence.

And you often do that by DEGREES over time.

For example, you may IDENTIFY the SIN of UNFORGIVENESS in your heart.

Someone has sinned against you and hurt you deeply. The person has confessed the sin to you. But you still feel bitterness – and you want the person to know the pain they have caused.

Think of that SIN of UNFORGIVENESS as a LIVING THING.

What does it need to LIVE?

In order to LIVE it needs to be **FED** and **NURTURED**.

It is FED and KEPT ALIVE as you go over it AGAIN and AGAIN in your mind. It is FED as you are CONSUMED with thinking about the way that person HURT you.

It is NURTURED and KEPT ALIVE when you talk with a certain friend about it.

So HOW do you KILL it?

You seek to KILL it the way you would KILL any other living thing.

You seek to **STARVE** it and **ABANDON** it.

When it comes to mind – you ACTIVELY work to SET YOUR MIND on things ABOVE – where CHRIST is – seated at the right hand of God.

Or you ACTIVELY work to think about what is HONORABLE and PLEASING in God’s sight…whatever is PURE…whatever is COMMENDABLE…and whatever is PRAISEWORTHY.

You work to ACTIVELY turn your mind to OTHER things.

And when you do – you are **STARVING that SIN**. You are KILLING it.

You are NOT giving it the FOOD it needs to SURVIVE.

That is just one small example of HOW SIN is KILLED.

You TAKE AWAY its FOOD supply.

BUT…to KILL SIN as Paul describes here is an ON-GOING and CONTINUAL work for us as believers. Our AIM is to COMPLETELY KILL SIN in our hearts and lives. But that will NOT be accomplished COMPLETELY until GLORY.

But notice God tells us something **even more profound** about HOW SIN is KILLED.

Look again at **verse 13**:

“…*but if* ***BY THE SPIRIT*** *you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*.”

Notice we are told the POWER which PUTS SIN to DEATH is the **SPIRIT**.

God tells us it is **BY THE SPIRIT** that SIN is PUT to DEATH in us.

This POWER to KILL SIN is done by CHRIST. He carries it out by giving us His SPIRIT to work in us.

In other words, **it is GOD’S POWER that KILLS SIN in you**.

God does this THROUGH Jesus Christ and His SPIRIT who lives in us.

That is a truth God tells us throughout the bible.

God always tells His people that ***HE*** is the one who FIGHTS for them – and ***HE*** is the one who gets the VICTORY.

This is what God told Joshua – when He brought His people into the Promised Land.

God told Joshua (**chapter 10**):

“*Do not fear them, for* ***I*** *have given them into your hands*.”

And these are the words repeated as Joshua and the army fought the battles:

“*The LORD fought for Israel!*”

YES Joshua and his army went into battle.

But it was the ***LORD*** who FOUGHT for them.

It was the ***LORD*** who KILLED their ENEMIES and brought them into the land!

**App**: And the same is true for you and me TODAY – as we seek to PUT SIN to DEATH.

We must remember the ***LORD*** is the one who KILLS our ENEMIES.

It will NEVER be YOUR strength – or YOUR power that will KILL SIN in your life.

It will be JESUS CHRIST’S POWER that will KILL your SIN.

And that’s why you have great HOPE when you seek to KILL SIN.

If you had to depend upon YOUR will-power – and YOUR self-discipline…

You would have NO HOPE! You would NEVER KILL SIN in your life.

But you have Jesus Christ in you. And HE is your KING who can and will KILL all HIS and YOUR ENEMIES.

This is your great – and secure – HOPE as a believer. You belong to Jesus Christ. HE is the one who FIGHTS for you. HE is the one who SECURES the victory.

YES you go into battle to KILL SIN each day. But your HOPE is not I yourself. You know it is the ***LORD*** who fights for you.

That doesn’t mean you DO NOTHING.

You are surely engaged in KILLING SIN. You surely use every effort – and use every means Jesus has given you to do it.

But your boldness and courage to keep it up comes from KNOWING it is the LORD who fights for you.

You may ask:

But if the SPIRIT alone can PUT SIN to DEATH why am I told to PUT SIN to DEATH?

But that could be said about EVERYTHING we do as believers.

We are told ALL the GOOD WORKS in us are HIS.

In **Philippians 2** we are told:

“…*for it is* ***God who works in you****, both* ***to will and to work*** *for his good pleasure*.”

YET God tells us to DO GOOD WORKS as believers.

And God does this WORK of SANCTIFICATION in us in such a way that it remains an act of our obedience – even though it is the SPIRIT of GOD at work in us!

It is CHRIST – by the SPIRIT of GOD – who gives SPIRITUAL LIFE to our souls which works on our MIND and WILL and AFFECTIONS.

It is because CHRIST is at work in you that you LOVE God – and WANT to do His will.

It is ALL a GIFT that COMES from God – THROUGH His Son Jesus Christ!

SECOND, you must know HOW to KILL.

**MP3**: **You must know WHY to kill** (12-13 – you will live)

THIRD, you must know WHY to kill.

We see this in **verse 12** – and **verse 13**.

Look again at **verse 12**.

“*So then, brothers,* ***we are debtors****, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*.”

WHY do you KILL SIN as a believer?

Because you are a DEBTOR to God’s GRACE in Jesus Christ!

You are NOT your own – but you have been BOUGHT at a price by Jesus Christ.

Jesus DIED to TAKE AWAY your SINS – and ROSE to give you NEW LIFE.

THAT is who you are now! You BELONG to Jesus Christ. You are a NEW creature!

So now it is your OBLIGATION to LIVE this NEW LIFE – KILLING SIN!

It is not something that is AGAINST your will – but it IS your will! It is your deepest DESIRE to KILL SIN – and follow Jesus Christ in true RIGHTEOUSNESS and HOLINESS!

And it is HIS WORK that has given you that desire!

So WHY do you KILL SIN?

Because you are a DEBTOR to God’s GRACE in Jesus Christ!

We KILL SIN – because we LOVE Jesus Christ – and have been LOVED by Him! PUTTING SIN to DEATH is not some form of LEGALISM. But it is a RESULT of Christ’s work of GRACE in us!

And we see where this NEW LIFE of Christ leads in **verse 13**.

“*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***.”

Notice God tells us the ultimate DESTINATION for those in the FLESH and those in the SPIRIT. He tells us WHERE they both will lead…where they will end up.

If you live according to the flesh **you will DIE**.

If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body – **you will LIVE**.

The DEATH and LIFE Paul talks about are ETERNAL DEATH and ETERNAL LIFE.

Paul is describing ULTIMATE DESTINATIONS.

App: And as a believer in Jesus Christ – this is where you look as you seek to KILL SIN.

When you are in the MIDST of the fight – and you are TIRED – you LIFT your eyes to JESUS and SEE where it is all leading. This PATH of KILLING SIN by the POWER of CHRIST – is the PATH of LIFE! It is the path that LEADS to LIFE with Christ forever.

And so –when KILLING SIN is DIFFICULT– you say what Peter said to Jesus (**John 6**):

“*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*…”

You are on the path that leads to LIFE.

**Conclusion**: So as followers of Christ we have a DEEP BETRAYER inside of us.

That DEEP BETRAYER is the SIN that still remains in us.

It is insidious and it is dangerous.

As those who belongs to Jesus Christ – we engage in KILLING SIN.

But we remember it is CHRIST who FIGHTS for us.

It is CHRIST who will finally KILL SIN in us one day. HE is the one who will ultimately CONQUER SIN in our hearts.

We have NO HOPE of conquering SIN by our power. It would never happen – and we would never even DESIRE for it to happen – without CHRIST in us.

In this world you WILL HAVE troubles as you seek to PUT SIN to DEATH.

But TAKE HEART – Jesus has OVERCOME the WORLD and your heart!

Let’s pray…