

Mortification

Great Awakening

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What is mortification of the flesh? Well, at the early service, we had with us a mortician and he knew what mortification was but it simply means putting to death the flesh. What does that mean? If I told you, you wouldn't stay for the sermon so I'm not going to tell you just yet so I want you to stay. That's called a tease.

Before we get into that, I want to tell you a story and that is this: it's now been nine years since my mom passed away, 8 ½ years for my dad. It doesn't hardly seem possible. It seems like it happened yesterday. Time has gone rather quickly since then and I would tell you this: I miss them every day. Every now and then, I play a song called "A Mother's Day," by a guy by the name of Jim Brickman. Does anybody know who Jim Brickman is? I have about eight hands here. He's a piano player. Generally it's instrumental but he puts some words to some of the songs and probably his most famous one is the one that you probably just heard last weekend and didn't know it, it's called "Valentine." They usually play it every Valentine's Day and it's a very romantic song. So that's Jim Brickman but anyway, he plays this one song called "A Mother's Day" and in "A Mother's Day" he describes a day in the life of a typical mom, actually it's more of an evening and I should have brought it to play it but I'll do that another time. But sometimes I play that and a tear will roll down my cheek as I think about the sacrifices that my mom made for me and really what a crummy kid I was. But 61 years ago, I became an Anderson with all the privileges attendant to that name and that family. The seeming unconditional love that I received, the access, the unfettered access to the dining room table and I don't know about you but I loved the dining room table. That was my favorite part of the day where we would sit around the table, my family, and mom would make some of her great fried chicken or whatever it was and then we'd push the plate back and sit back in our chairs and we would opine about the events of the day or we would opine about philosophical matters and solve the world's problems, develop a way of thinking about the world. Sometimes it was just plain family nostalgia but it was always fun and we would talk for an hour an hour and a half after dinner just as a family. I dearly loved those times.

Every now and then in spite of all the family privileges, I would sully the family name. I wouldn't take advantage of my parents' wisdom on matters and their advice on any number of subjects. Sometimes I would defy my parents. Sometimes I'd just behave in a

manner that was not up to the Anderson standard and my dad was occasionally disciplinary. I think I've told you before that he was a patriotic man: he would lay down stripes and I would see stars. At other times, I learned the hard way that my folks really knew what was best for me and my best was to put to death my own agenda in favor of theirs. And gradually I become more and more like my father and as much as I would have rebelled against the thought 50 years ago, today I am my father. Not as wise, not as successful in life but my choices are generally his choices. My mannerisms are typically his mannerisms. You know, my folks were able to travel really quite a bit and in their retirement years they were able to visit 94 different countries and my son used to like to say that if you wanted to know what they did on a trip, you would go and talk to nanna, but if you wanted to find out what they ate on the trip, you'd go to poppa and I am poppa. I am my father.

Now, what I told you was word for word true, that story, but it also is a metaphor for the subject matter we're looking at today. We're studying the history of and themes from the Great Awakening which is a movement of God in the first half of the 18th century and it was an amazing work of God, the Holy Spirit, unifying this great country of ours and bringing spiritual life and a biblical worldview to hundreds of thousands of people over the years. It would be wrong to reduce it to a formula but there were certain common themes that emerged from the pulpits of Colonial America and we've looked at one of them two weeks ago, we read "you must be born again." We were born once into this physical world but in order to have a spiritual life, we must be born again, born of the Spirit of God.

Now many of you are saying to yourselves, "Why, of course you have to be born again in order to have life with God to go to heaven." But, you see, in the 18th century, it wasn't all that way. I mean, everybody in the 18th century went to church if it was at all possible. Many times it was impossible but if it were at all possible, people were in church. It was the socially acceptable thing to do. Even if you didn't believe in Jesus Christ, even if you didn't believe in God, even if you didn't believe in his Bible, you still went to church. So the Great Awakening took place among a churchgoing people.

Now today, that's a little less true. We have golf and tv and computers and boating and fishing and tennis and we can often find socially and culturally acceptable alternatives to church. So generally preachers today speak to folks who believe in Jesus Christ, who believe in God, who believe in his Bible but every week, I can't remember when it wasn't so but every week we generally have people with us who are just curious or maybe they're seeking God and they just don't know how to think about God so they come to church. So because of that, every week I like to tell you in rather short fashion how to get right with God, on the path to heaven, and it's particularly relevant today given our topic which is mortification of the flesh.

You see, when we're born into this world, the Bible teaches that we are devoid of spiritual life. We have a spiritual deficit. The Bible describes that person as "a natural person." And this is what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to

understand them because they are spiritually discerned." The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him. You see, the natural person's spiritual sensor is in the off position; he is dead to God without the capacity to understand the things of God. That person is without faith in Almighty God and because of that cannot, is not able to please God. Wait a minute, John, did you just make that up? Here's what the Bible says, Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." The natural man is otherwise spiritually dead. And here's Ephesians 2, Paul says this, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins," now, he's not talking about physical death there, he's talking about being dead to God. And then Paul goes on to describe the life of those who have yet to come to faith in God. Ephesians 2:3, "among the sons of disobedience we once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

Now, Paul wrote this to the church at Ephesus. He is writing this letter and these things to church people, to religious people and I want you to hold onto the thought that comes out of that passage: we once lived in the passions of our flesh, "once" being past tense, because you see that directly connects with our topic. The summary of all of this is that in our natural state we cannot, we could not please God because either we are doing the wrong things or we are doing the right things with the wrong motivation. In either case, it came back with "Rejected" stamped all over it. But God in his magnificent and forbearing love brought salvation to his rebellious people through Jesus Christ, his own dear Son, the second of the holy Trinity. When Jesus died, he absorbed God's wrath and condemnation for all of his people. Jesus took the wrap for us but we have to own it. We have to make it ours. We need to believe our problem with sin and God's salvation was Jesus. If you have never made this set of facts your own, then I plead with you today to do so now. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Imagine. Imagine that a sacrificial love would come from one who had been so forbearing with the rebellion of his own creatures and so John puts it this way in 1 John 3, a letter he wrote, John wrote, "Of what country is this love of God that we should be called children of God?" Now, some of the translations that you all carry will say something like "behold what manner of love," but that really misses the nuance of the word that the apostle uses here because the word that the apostle uses here indicates an alien love. It comes from a distant place and that's why you can easily translate this "of what country is this love of God?" It's outside. We don't know it. It doesn't exist anywhere. Of what country is this love of God that we, the rebellious people, should be called his children.

When we put our faith in Jesus, we become new creatures. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." We have a new nature. We now have the capacity to please God because we have faith. We now have the opportunity for the first time to do the right thing with the right motivation is God is pleased with that; and God is glorified by that.

Not only are we aligned with the purpose for which we were created and life is different because we are now a new creation but we aren't perfect. Not yet. We wait for heaven for that. In the meantime, God at the day we become born again as John 3 says, the day we come to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, God begins a process in us collaborating with his very very weak partners, you and I, in order that we might grow in personal holiness. Now, I don't know about you, but it's a bit troubling to me that our new nature doesn't immediately and automatically change our behavior into sinless perfection but the reality is that it just doesn't.

Now, that's manifestly true by observation. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but this is what Galatians says, "For the desires of the flesh," which is his way of describing the old nature, "the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh for they are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do." And I know that you've done that before. I have too. You know what the right thing is. You know you shouldn't blow your stack. You know you shouldn't say those words. You know that you should turn the computer monitor off and away from you. And you do it. The war that exists inside of us between flesh and spirit, what that means, the net effect is that we're going to struggle with sin even though we have the capacity not to sin. My friend, David Young, who comes to church here and he wasn't here today, I guess he gave in to sin. Don't tell Dave I said that. Dave put it this way, he says, "The sin factory is shut down but we sin out of inventory."

You see, that's where our sermon text comes in today and it's also where the penetrating preaching of the 18th century was. Romans 8:13, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die," again, here he's talking about a spiritual death, deadness to God, "but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live," have spiritual life. You see, one of the evidences of the new nature in you is a desire to do what God pleases. When you're a new creation, God puts his Holy Spirit in you and you have a different set of values and things are different and you begin to change from the inside out.

So the apostle says we must put to death the deeds of the body, the flesh that's at war with the spirit and that's what mortification is. Mortification of the deeds, putting to death of the deeds of our old nature, the nature we had prior to that new life in Christ that we receive by faith. You recall that even while I was an Anderson, I did things that displeased my father. I don't know if you knew this but in high school I was a rock and roll star. You probably picked that up from the singing today. We lived in north Jersey and when I was 15 years old my parents let me just go into New York City whenever we wanted to and we'd take a bus in and we'd park our car at the Paramus Mall and hop on a bus and ride into Port Authority and then walk. We just played in New York City. You know, I wouldn't let my kids go to Naples by themselves. But we would just hang around in New York City and we went to concerts.

I may have even told you this story before but we went to hear Jimi Hendrix, we went to hear Eric Clapton and Cream and Jim Morrison and the Doors. Are you disappointed in me now? I love those guys. They're awesome. One night they went long and it was 2 o'clock in the morning and we went to the Port Authority and the last bus was just pulling

out and I was 15 years old and in New York City by myself with one thin dime in my pocket which I used to call my dad and I said, "Hey dad, whatcha doin'?" "Well, until a few minutes ago I was sleeping." "Dad, do you know that the city is beautiful at night? I wonder if you can come on down and help me out of a jam?" And do you know what? Dad drove into the city and we got in the back seat of the car, kind of braced for what we deserved. He never said a word. "How was the concert?" "Great." "Alright." We just in silence drove home and never heard about that again and I had to wonder how hard my mom had leaned on my dad.

You know, I did things that displeased my father from time to time, things that actually prevented a better ultimate outcome for me. I was too willful and proud to admit and accept that maybe my loving father knew what was best for me in the end and the path that would take me there. But in spite of all the trouble I gave my parents, in spite of all the heartache and headaches I gave them, I never lost the family name and today my name is John Anderson because they didn't disown me. I never lost my father's love in spite of my rebelliousness but I did displease him and over time I learned to subjugate my thirst for instant gratification to the will and wisdom of my father to my own benefit.

So also, though we fall to the desires of our flesh, our sin nature, we don't lose the family name of being a believer in Jesus Christ and we don't lose the unconditional love of our Father. The Bible says that we need, that is to say, it is incumbent on us who name the name of Christ to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to conform ourselves to the will of the heavenly Father. That is mortification and it is a cooperative work between God and us. Did you see what the apostle said in that passage in 8:13? He says, "if by the Spirit." God is going to participate with us. God, the Holy Spirit, is going to help us put to death the deeds of the flesh, the sin nature, the body.

Now, everybody that I read on this matter over the past week referenced John Owen. John Owen was a 17th century theologian, preacher and academician and he wrote a book entitled "The Mortification of Sin" and in that book, which is now available on Kindle for \$1.99, he wrote this, "The vigor and power of your spiritual life is dependent upon mortification of sin." I'm going to read that to you again. It's important. The vigor and power of your spiritual life is dependent upon mortification of sin. In his book, Owen likened sin to a weed and you pull the weed up but the root remains and the weed comes back and it spreads and eventually it chokes the life out of whatever it's growing on, it's parasitic. And that's how Owen describes sin. I think that's a pretty good indication.

So mortification of sin was thundered from the pulpits of America during the first half of the 18th century and we don't hear too much about that today. We don't hear too much about mortification of the flesh. We don't like to hear about sin, frankly. It's ugly. It's uncomfortable. It reminds us of our baser nature. But the Bible says we must put to death, mortify, our sinful nature and that does not happen by ignoring it. It's like the weed. If you say, "My gosh, I've got a weed in the garden. Ah, I'm not going to worry about it." What's going to happen? You're going to come back and your garden is going to be overgrown with weeds and so it is with sin. If you don't put to death the deeds of the flesh, your heart will become overrun with sin.

Okay, so our takeaway today is helpful hints for mortifying your sinful nature and there are a few and you'll find them in the outline I provided. And I believe, 1., I believe it is of first importance to be familiar with our new identity in Christ because sometimes I think that we forget that we've been bought with a price, we are not our own, we belong to Christ which is exactly what 1 Corinthians 6:20 says. You are not your own, you are bought with a price so glorify God with your body.

Paul deals with this same issue time and time and time and time again but probably no more than in Colossians which Dave read for us a little earlier here this morning, Colossians 3:5. The apostle says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." Now, I had to go through seminary to discover that whenever you see a "therefore" you have to look and see what it's there for. And look what he says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." You see, it's what precedes it that gives him the leverage to make that statement. Now, you may or may not be familiar with this passage but what precedes it? What precedes it is one of the most beautiful statements of identity in Christ in the whole Bible. I love this third chapter of Colossians. Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised with Christ," you have faith in Jesus Christ, "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died," to yourself, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." That's beautiful, isn't it? Whoa. Christ is our life. Our identity is in him. You should preach that to yourself every morning when you get out of bed in the morning. You don't need a pulpit. Look in the mirror and say, "Your identity is in Christ today." Wrap yourself up in that.

So of first importance is to be familiar with your new identity in Christ and remind yourself of that identity day after day after day lest you forget. 2. Renew your mind. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Change the tapes in your mind, figuratively speaking of course. Whereas the old tape said, "Revenge!" replace it with a new tape that says, "Forgive!" Whereas the old tape said, "Hate!" replace that tape with a tape that says, "Love!" And whereas that old tape said, "Curse!" replace that tape with a tape that says, "Bless!" How do you do that? By getting the Bible off the page and into your brain. You can't do it without refreshing yourself regularly by the Bible. You see, the Bible is counter-intuitive and it's counter-cultural therefore it cuts across our instincts. It is not our instinct to love instead of hate. It's not our instinct to forgive instead of revenge. It's not our instinct to bless instead of curse. And so what the Bible gives us is information on how to be counter-cultural and so you need to get that off the page and you need to get that into your brain. Get the culture into your mind by putting the Bible into your brain. Make it number one on your reading list.

So, 3. Learn to admit sin. We deny sin. We explain it away. We euphemize it. Let me be clear, I didn't say euthanize it. That's what we don't do. We euphemize it; we make it sound good. We ignore it. We call it something else. We justify it. We dance all around it but often we don't call sin sin. Call it what it is. Herbert Marcuse was a German

philosopher, a sociologist, a political theorist. He's the man behind the modern political correctness movement. He had as one of his disciples someone named Saul Alinsky and he believed that if you could not call something what it actually was, then you could not fight it and you could not win. Herbert Marcuse introduced that theory, that PC thinking, in an effort to topple capitalist societies in favor of socialist societies but the same applies to sin. If you can't call it what it is, you can't mortify it. Call sin what it is. Admit it and put it to death.

Which is 4. Put sin to death. You refuse it, reject it, starve it, kill it. It's going to be painful. It's going to hurt and when it does, then you should exchange one passion for another. Get passionate about God. Get passionate about serving God. Get compassionate about others. Get compassionate about serving others. When you disengage the battle, when you withdraw from the battle and you turn your energies inward, you serve only yourself and it makes it hard to mortify sin. But when you turn your energies out and re-engage the fight, then you can demonstrate passion for others. You can help others. You can help God. So put sin to death. Refuse it. Reject it. Starve it. Kill it.

5. Include the positive. Romans 13, "let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." Romans 13:14, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh." Yes, mortify the flesh but also whatever you put off, also put on. Put to death what is earthly, Colossians 3:5. Colossians 3:8, put on the new self; put off the old self. Colossians 3:12, put on compassionate hearts; put away anger, wrath and malice. So are you putting away anger, wrath and malice? Put on compassionate hearts. Include the positive.

6. Ask the Holy Spirit for help. God has given us special enablement in this fight. Ask the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:13, our sermon text, by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh. The Holy Spirit is here to help us. Ask for his help.

7. Even if you fail remember that God is your heavenly Father. God demands perfection but he doesn't expect it. He's expecting some failure otherwise why would Jesus have said, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"? Why else would John have said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse from all unrighteousness"? God demands perfection, he doesn't expect it. Remember that God is your heavenly Father. His love is unconditional. He cannot love you more than he does right now or more perfectly because his love is perfect.

Finally, 8. Whenever you fail and you drag yourself away from the failure and you feel like you're a loser in God's sight, the great Scottish preacher, Alexander Maclaren said, "For every look at your sin, take ten looks at the cross," because the failure has been paid in full with great joy. Get up and mortify your flesh again. By the Spirit, Paul says, put to death the deeds of the flesh.

Let's pray together.

God, we thank you for our Lord Jesus who did in fact go to the cross. Because we will fail, he made it possible for us to bridge the sin chasm that we had constructed by our sin. And now, God, you want to help us as we engage the fight of mortifying the flesh. Help us, God, to put to death the deeds of the flesh that we might live unto you. Hear us, God. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Mortifying the Flesh
Romans 8: 13
Rev. John Anderson
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Introduction

- We are studying the history and themes from the Great Awakening
- An amazing work of God, the Holy Spirit

I. Born Again – the New Nature

- a. We are born once – into the physical world – necessary for life
- b. We must be born again to have spiritual life.
- c. When a person is born into this world, he/she is devoid of spiritual life.
- d. The natural person's spiritual sensor is in the "off" position.
- e. The natural person is unable to please God.
- f. We once lived in the passions of our flesh. (Eph. 2:3)
- g. God brought salvation to His people through Jesus Christ.
- h. Jesus took the rap for us.
- i. "Of what country is this love that we should be called children of God."

II. Characteristics of the New Nature

- a. We now have the capacity to please God – because we have faith.
- b. We aren't perfect.
- c. God begins a process in us of making us holy, and that with weak partners.
- d. It is troubling that our new nature doesn't immediately and automatically change our behavior into sinless perfection, but it doesn't.
- e. That means we will struggle with sin.
- f. One of the evidences of the new nature is the desire to do what pleases God.
- g. The apostle says put to death the flesh/body/natural man.

III. Take Away

- a. Be familiar with your new identity in Christ.
- b. Renew your mind.
- c. Learn to admit sin.
- d. Put sin to death.
- e. Include the positive.
- f. Ask the Holy Spirit.
- g. Even if you fail – God is your heavenly Father who loves you.
- h. For every look at your sin failure, look ten times at the cross.