

## **Romans 8:12,13**

**<sup>12</sup>Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**

**<sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

We have been told in Romans that all true believers are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. We are not under the realm, under the control of the flesh, but we are under the realm, under the control of the Spirit.

In verse 12 Paul tells us about our obligation. Paul's reasoning is that because we have been delivered from the realm of flesh, we have no obligation to that realm. And since we HAVE been delivered into the realm of the Spirit, we have a complete obligation to live according to the Spirit.

Now let's go back to this idea of position and operation. Paul is reasoning that since we have moved from the **position** of being in sin to the **position** of being in Christ, or in the Spirit...

We have changed **positions**...

we are now obligated to have our **operation** be congruent with our **position**.

When I lived in Pennsylvania, I had a PA driver's license. I was obligated to have it. When I moved to Maryland I was no longer obligated to have a PA license. But I did have a new obligation. I was obligated to have a license congruent with the state I was living in. Having a PA license proved that I was a PA resident. It did not make me a PA resident, but it proved that I was. When I got a MD license, it proved that I was a MD resident. That is a very simple illustration of what we are talking about here.

Scripture is very clear about this concept. Our operation, over time, proves our position. It doesn't determine our position. We don't **obtain** the position by how we live. But how we live **proves** what our position is. If we fail to understand **that**, we will never understand the book of Romans.

So, Paul has told us a great deal about our position. Here in this text he is talking about our operation. There are two ways,

and only two ways to live. We can walk according to the flesh and we can walk according to the Spirit. Over time, the way we walk will prove the position we are in. If we walk according to the flesh, we prove ourselves to be IN flesh. And we will suffer the fate of being in that position, which is eternal death. If we walk according to the Spirit we prove ourselves to be IN the Spirit. That is all Paul is saying.

Some would say that, where verse 12 says if you walk according to the flesh you will die, this is talking about the fact that God will discipline a believer even to the point of death. And it is true that God will do such a thing. It is the severest of mercies. But I think to interpret this verse as talking about the discipline of a believer is a mistake. I think it goes outside the flow of the context. It would be an abrupt aside. It would be like when you are talking to a person who is easily distracted and in the middle of the conversation he says, "look, a chicken" and then goes right back to the conversation.

The way I see it Paul sticks to his theme that we live out what we are.

But there is a problem. We **were** in the flesh. We are **now** in the Spirit. But we live in a **body**. And that body **knows how** to live in the flesh, **prefers** to live in the flesh, and has nothing inherent in its members that **will act** according to the Spirit. So how do we who are **IN** the Spirit **ACT** like we are in the Spirit? How do we operate in one realm while housed in the remnant of another?

We know that if we continue to operate like we are in the flesh we will prove ourselves to not be in the Spirit. Yet we see that our behavior in our body does not automatically, by itself, come into line when we change positions. What are we supposed to do? What does real spirituality look like? How do we live the Christian life in this body of ours?

Well, not to despair, Paul gives us the answer. **if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

Here is the description of what it looks like when a believer is living according to the Spirit. Beware of those who offer a prettier version. Everything I read in scripture tells me that the

struggle that I am going to go through from the time my position changes to the time that my location changes is not going to be pretty. Read the stories of the people listed in the Hebrews faith hall of fame chapter.

<sup>7</sup>By faith Noah,

<sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham

<sup>11</sup>By faith Sarah

<sup>13</sup>These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup>For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup>And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

<sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham,

<sup>20</sup>By faith Isaac

<sup>21</sup>By faith Jacob,

<sup>22</sup>By faith Joseph,

<sup>23</sup>By faith Moses

<sup>31</sup>By faith the harlot Rahab

Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

We know all their stories. Each of them had baggage. Each had failures. Each had to put to death the deeds of their bodies. In that sense they are just like us. If we have faith, if we are in Christ like they were in Christ, the journey may not be pretty, but we will cling to the hope of that eternal city until the end. And we will display the faith that has been placed in us by God from now until we die. None of us would want a movie made of every second of the story, but we know it will end well.

I want to encourage you this morning. If you look around you and you think that your Christian life should be easy and that no one wrestles with the sins you wrestle with. If you think that,

with the evil impulses you have and the history of failure you keep secret, that you can't possibly be a Christian. If you think **that**, be encouraged. Paul expected this struggle. Paul didn't paint a picture where a Christian just drifts into higher and higher planes of spirituality. He put it in graphic terms. And it doesn't matter if you are a new believer or if you have been a believer for 90 years. Your need for putting to death the deeds of the body will be just as great at the end as it was at the beginning. The need to put to death the deeds of the body will not end until you have a new body. And Praise God a new body is coming.

So along with this encouragement comes a challenge. Just as we cannot PANIC when we see the evil that still lives in our bodies, so we cannot ACCEPT the evil that lives in our bodies.

Have you ever had fleas in your house? With 5 cats at our house it is inevitable. The first time it happened we panicked. We released enough chemicals to kill a few small towns. Now when it happens we don't panic. But we also don't say, oh good we have fleas. We don't care. We have lots of blood. We don't need it all. No, we come up with a plan to get rid of them. Every one we can kill, we kill. There is no peaceful coexistence. And we won't stop until every single one is dead.

That is the attitude we must have when we see the signs of sin in our bodies. We don't need to say, oh no, I want to sin. All is lost. I must not be a believer.

We don't need to say, "I thought God was going to take all this away. I thought being spiritual meant being obedient would be easy." Paul never says that.

We also don't need to say, as some have said, that, "until God takes away the desire to sin, I am sinning even when I don't commit the sin I am tempted to do. So I MIGHT AS WELL sin."

No! We must say "I don't expect anything else from my body. Paul told me it is a body of sin. And he told me to expect that I would need to put to death its deeds. So here we go again. I need to get to work." That is the attitude of a believer toward sin. This attitude avoids the faithless whimpering that says, "I am not good enough to be a Christian." And it also avoids the

rebellious thinking that says, "It's ok to sin because I live in a body."

We mentioned last week that Paul always adds a therefore to his theology. We can never think we truly **believe** what Paul teaches if it does not result in **doing** what Paul commands. Faith without works isn't real faith. It is dead.

The therefore in this text is that our obligation is to "By the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body." This is simply restating

### **Romans 6:11-13**

**11Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**12Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. A large portion of the Holy Spirit's job description has to do with enlightening our minds with the truth that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of scripture to write. So to do something "by the Spirit" is to do it being led by Spirit and applying the truth of the Spirit. So how do we put to death the deeds of the body.

First we must believe what the Spirit says about our salvation. We must coldly calculate that what Scripture says is true and any perceptions we have that are counter to what scriptures says are false. We reckon that we are dead to sin. We believe that we are free from the ruling principle of sin. We do not have to obey the sinful desires of our bodies. They have no more absolute power over us. All our bodies can do now is to give us suggestions that we are free to disregard. Until we believe that truth, we are not armed to do battle with our sinful desires. But once we believe what God says, we can cling to it by faith, by the Spirit and walk

according to that truth. We can walk according to the Spirit. And we can say "No" to our sinful desires and "Yes" to obedience.

I want you to understand this morning that when rebellious desires arise in our hearts, they **feel** powerful. They **feel** as if we must obey them. But they lie. That is the only power they have. They have the power to lie. It is at that very point that you must talk back to the devil. You must claim that you are dead to that sin that looms so large in front of you. You can tell the devil to hit the road and he must. Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. That is where and when the battle is won. And it is only won by faith in the word of God. It is only won by the Spirit. We have got to quit acting like spiritual pansies. A believer is not a victim of sin any more. If we act like we are victims, we give the devil more honor than is due him. He doesn't have that kind of power. And we dishonor Christ with that attitude. Did Christ really set us free from the power of sin, or are they just words like to use that really don't describe anything concrete, anything real? Is this like the slogans that sell products on tv, they're not really true but they are catchy? Or is this freedom that Christ gives us a rock bottom truth that empowers us to live for Christ?

Now back to the text. It is important to note that where it says "Put to death the deeds of the body" that this is in the continuous tense. It means to do it today, to do it tomorrow and to do it the next day. It means to do it until we die.

There are several views that people hold that are clearly violations of, if not misunderstandings of, this text.

One view holds that we can step up to a higher plane where this struggle goes away. On this plane we have perfect victory over sin. It is usually accompanied with some kind of experience. And once that experience happens the Christian life somehow becomes much easier. The body is no longer the nuisance it once was. And at that point there really isn't much of a battle left.

The problem with this view is that no matter how much proof texting a person does to make this point, the verb tense in verse 13 is enough to deal this view a death blow. We need to put to death the deeds of the body and we need to keep on putting them to death.

To put to death means to deaden, to render inoperative. If we could do this once and it was done, we could use the aorist tense. While we might wish that were the truth, that is not what scripture says. The body screams its desires or demands and we must put each and every one to death.

Another error is called counteraction. This view is that Christ accomplishes our sanctification the same way he accomplishes our justification. It is substitutionary. It is not something we must do by His power. It is something He must do by His power. So when we find the deeds of the body present, their answer is that we must surrender all this to Christ and let Him take care of it.

Some build upon their theories of sovereignty to such a place that they say our wills cannot play a part in this work. They say that it is not we, who through the Spirit, act to put to death the deeds of the flesh. They say God through the Spirit must put to death the deeds of the flesh. That is hypercalvinism.

But a simple reading of the text shows this view to be wrong.

It is not stated that **Christ** will put to death the deeds of the body. It is **we** who **must** and it is we who can, by the Spirit, do this thing. Scripture says it is our duty and obligation to do this.

We must constantly ask, are we guided by scripture or guided by a theory.

So how does scripture guide us into putting to death the deeds of the body. What is the reasoning for this Christlike behavior?

Let's take a quick look at 5 things we have learned so far in our study of Romans:

1- Change of Position- We are no longer under the realm of flesh. We have a new position. We talk about this over and over but it is the core of Paul's reasoning. We are no longer in the position of flesh. We have a completely new position. We have a whole new realm. We are in the Spirit, in Christ. So we have come under a whole new source of power. It is like emigrating to a new country. There are so many stories of men and women who escaped persecution in their country and fled to places like United States to avoid further persecution. These people often speak of their great appreciation that they were accepted into this country. By coming here their whole life changed. That is the kind of thing this change of realm is like for a believer. But it is a million times more profound. We have come from the land of sin with no hope, no future, only the expectation sin and death. Then we came to the land of Christ. We are under His benevolent rule, protected from ultimate harm and promised a glorious inheritance. With this change of position, we have no reason to uphold the traditions of our old country.

2- Change of Jurisdiction- We are no longer under the jurisdiction of flesh. Flesh no longer has any "rights" over us. 6:14 Sin no longer has dominion over us. Flesh no longer has a legal hold on us. When I lived in PA, PA had jurisdiction over me. It had a legal right to determine my behavior. Now PA does not have that right but MD does. That is similar to how we are no longer under the jurisdiction of flesh but under the jurisdiction of the Spirit. So there is no reason to sin because sin has no hold over us.

3- Change of Identity- Sin is no longer that which defines us. It is now only a pestering principle. Sin is only residual now. Sin used to be my identity. If you were to ask the question, who is Jon? And you answered the question, "Jon is a sinner." You would have told the whole story. Now sin only a small part of a believer. It is no longer the title of the book. It is just a paragraph in the story. A believer is in

Christ. There is no reason to sin because it isn't who we are.

4- Change of Congruent Choices- Living according to the flesh is now incongruent. It can be done temporarily, just like an immigrant from an arid land might drink out of a mud puddle, but it seems pretty stupid when there is a kitchen sink tap to drink from. When sin defined us, choosing sinful behavior was very appropriate. In fact to do anything else would have been inconsistent, even hypocritical. Now living according the flesh is a contradiction to the norm. It is hypocritical. It is uncomfortable. It is no longer fitting behavior.

To live according to the flesh is like me pretending to be a PA citizen. It is reverting again to the realm of death. We have reason not to do it because it is no longer "us". In fact, it goes completely against what is now true about us.

5- Change in Who we love- To live after the flesh is to grieve the Holy Spirit. When we were in flesh we could have cared less. We had no spiritual vision. We could not see. We were dead in our sins. And we were content to live in our sinful state.

Then Christ woke us up. We could see. We could respond to His call on our lives. We were filled with gratitude for what Christ did for us. We see His sacrifice for us as the most important event in this planet's history. We have been forgiven much and now we love much.

To sin now is to grieve the one we love. To sin now is to hurt the one that saved us. It is a dishonor to the one that only deserves honor. To despise the one that should only be respected. It is to make light of the most important event and the most important person in our lives. So we, of all people have reason to say no to the deeds of the body.

So today we have covered the truths that

1- A believer **WILL** live putting to death the deeds of the body.

- 2- We are going to have the struggle **all our lives** of putting the deeds of the body to death. There are no short cuts.
- 3- It is **WE** who must do it. God will not do it in our place.
- 4- It must be done **through the Spirit**, by applying and believing the word of God about what Christ has done.
- 5- We listed 5 reasons we have for putting to death the deeds of the body. There are many more but these are the ones emphasized in the reasoning of Romans.

To close I would like to read how Paul regarded his life. I think it is an apt statement of what our lives will look like when we really believe his teaching.

**Phillipians 3: 7-14** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; (If Paul didn't attain it here and now, we sure won't) **but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do,** (the one thing we should do) **forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Let's press on together this week toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.