

How to Slay Sin, Part 4

Scripture: Matthew 26:41; 2 Corinthians 10:5

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We've been considering some of the necessary steps toward killing sin. That's a binding command for every believer. No one is exempt from slaying sin (Colossians 3:5), but no one is powerless against it either (Romans 8:13). God has equipped and empowered all those who abide in Christ (John 15:5) with the necessary wisdom and weapons to succeed. Here are the steps we have considered:

First, **understand your true position as a Christian**. You are *in* Christ, united to Him through faith. He already triumphed over sin and His victory becomes *your* victory.

Second, **weaken sinful habits and strengthen righteous behavior**. *Starve out* sin, *cut off* all provision. Lay it aside like an old, worn out garment and replace it with righteous, godly behavior.

Third, **fill your mind with Scripture**. Let it saturate your mind, control your affections and determine the course of your life. Unleash the Word of God on your sins.

And now for the fourth and final step: **Prepare for battle**.

Now that you understand the nature and strategy of your enemy, prepare for its attacks. That means you anticipate ambushes, think like a soldier, train yourself for battle, and select your comrades carefully.

Along those lines, here are some final, practical steps you can take:

-**Watch and pray**. In war, failing to post guards is costly—and often *deadly*. An army needs a look-out, someone dependable to watch for approaching danger, notify troops and call for reinforcements. He stands watch while others eat, remains alert when others are distracted, and stays awake while others sleep. He's the first to detect invasion and sound the alarm (Ezekiel 33:3). If he fails in his task, lives *will* be lost.

As a Christian, your lifestyle closely parallels that of a soldier engaged in combat (2 Timothy 2:3-4). First, you're to be *watchful*. That means you walk carefully (Ephesians 5:15), staying clear of landmines and remaining alert for approaching danger (1 Peter 5:8). You never lose your sense of direction or forget the closeness of your enemy (Romans 7:21). As a good soldier of Christ, you must carefully guard your steps against temptation (Psalm 119:9) and avoid all positions of compromise.

Being watchful in the New Testament is often linked to *prayer*. Consider Christ's instructions to

His disciples on the night of His arrest: “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). Remember how the events of that night unfolded? The disciples didn’t watch *or* pray—they *slept*. And when temptation came, they *all* abandoned Christ—even the ever-confident Peter (Matthew 26:69-75).

Praying that God will protect you from temptation and deliver you from evil (Matthew 6:13) can’t be divorced from a pursuit of personal holiness. That means you should *never* provide your flesh with the opportunity to tempt you (Romans 13:14). If thoughts of sexual immorality are a struggle for you, beware of things that excite that lust—music, books, magazines, television, and of course, the *Internet*. One man gave this example: “Don’t prove your purity in a pornography shop.” You get the point—watch and pray. Be alert!

-Train your mind. The battle against sin begins in your mind. That’s the prime target of your enemy, so “cast down every argument” and “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Consider the alternative: You’ll either take sinful thoughts captive, or *be taken captive* by sinful thoughts (Colossians 2:8). God has given you a sound mind, Christian. You can successfully combat wayward thoughts when they assault your mind and threaten to undo you (2 Timothy 1:7).

John Piper said, “Develop mental habits that continually renew the mind in God-centeredness (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16).” Don’t underestimate the power of a disciplined thought life. Meditate on powerful texts like these:

The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. (Isaiah 26:3)

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philippians 4:8) Do you *constantly* set your mind on those attributes of Christ, or do base, earthly thoughts occupy your mind? Contemplate the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5). Train your mind, Christian.

-Discipline your body. The fight against sin includes bodily discipline and gaining control over the physical realm. Note the importance Paul placed on bodily self-control when he drew an analogy from athletic games:

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave. (1 Corinthians 9:25-27) Paul fought like a man in a boxing match, and he ran like a man in a marathon. He battled fatigue and frustration by pressing forward and keeping his eyes on the prize—Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:14). Paul understood what was at stake and trained himself accordingly.

Make your body your *slave*. Resist sinful impulses and train yourself to say “No!” That often includes sleeping habits (Proverbs 6:9-11) as well as eating habits (Proverbs 23:2). Gaining

control over those areas is often key to other victories. Many sinful habits are sustained by “muscle memory.” It’s what allows you to tie your shoes or type without looking. Give your muscles *new* memories in accordance with godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Teach your eyes to look elsewhere, your feet to walk a different path, your hands to serve, and your mouth to edify. Examine where your body is involved and bring it into submission.

-Pursue Christ-centered relationships within the local church. If you’re going to prepare for war, you’d better find a worthy comrade to fight alongside you—someone to warn you of impending danger, push you out of harm’s way, and remind you of your marching orders. Consider this warning from Hebrews 3:

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13) That’s a powerful reminder that you and I don’t fight in this war alone. We *need* each other. God reminds us of this in numerous places (Romans 12:4-5; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 10:25). Only a fool isolates himself (Proverbs 18:1). In the war against sin, a *lone* ranger is a *dead* ranger.

Those are just a few practical measures you can take to prepare yourself for battle. God has granted us victory in the war against sin, but we *must* engage in the battle. To dodge the divine draft notice is to forfeit all hope of victory.

Robert Moffat understood that concept. He served as a missionary to South Africa for more than half a century and said, “We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only one short hour before sunset in which to win them.” May God grant you strength in that heated hour of battle.

Slay your sins, Brethren.

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