

## **Aggressively Attacking the Sin in Our Lives**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-308

We've been talking about the spiritual battle and the spiritual struggle that we as believers engage in. We have looked fairly closely at Romans 7. We now understand who we are in Christ. The essential new nature, the new creature that we are. We know we have a struggle with sin. And we clarified, I trust, so that you understand and that you have the joy of the realization that the truest and purest expression of who you are is that longing and that love for righteousness and for our Lord.

Now, the battle does rage and I would be unfaithful to you if I didn't give you some insight into how to gain victory in that day-to-day struggle. And we want to talk about that tonight. We're gonna talk about tonight maybe the negative side, how to sort of overpower sin and next Sunday night we're gonna make a bit of a more positive statement along that line as well.

But to begin with, I want to borrow from the Old Testament a story that will serve for us as an illustration. It is purely an illustration. It's an analogy. I don't normally use Old Testament stories in this fashion. But I think it's so memorable that it works. And I remember when I was writing the book *The Vanishing Conscience*, that this struck me and became a part of a chapter in that book.

So turn to 1 Samuel 15. Now in this chapter we find an illustration that will help us in a memorable way to understand how important it is to deal with sin in our lives. We'll look at Samuel 15 and just the first few verses. To start with 1 through 3. Samuel, who of course represent God, said to Saul, who was the king, "The Lord sent me to anoint you as king over his people, over Israel. Now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish and elect for what he did to Israel. How he sent himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amaleck and utterly destroy all that he has. Do not spare him but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

This is essentially to wipe out an entire tribe of people. God's command is clear, it is unmistakable. They are all to die, including infants, children and animals. Saul was to deal ruthlessly with Amaleck, the Amalekites. An ancient tribe of people living in the southern portion of the land of Canaan. The whole tribe was to be obliterated. The whole tribe was to be put out of existence. This was genocide really. Without mercy, no hostage taken, no one is to survive.

And I suppose this raises the question that is often asked about God: "What would make the God of infinite love meet out such a severe judgment." Well, everyone is going to die. This is just a

preemptive death. So in one sense all sinners are going to perish. These are going to perish by the will of God if Saul is faithful in one great act of judgment. They were, by the way, descendants of Esau, according to Genesis 36. They were an ancient nomadic people. They inhabited, as I said, the southern part of Canaan, and they were the perennial enemies of the Jews. They were the same tribe that viciously attacked Israel at Refedim shortly after the exodus. And that's what verse 2 is saying. Just as Israel was coming out of Egypt, they were attacked by these Amalekites.

This is famous battle, by the way, when Aaron and Herr held up the arms of Moses. It's recorded in the Exodus 17. And these Amalekites did something that was very, very dishonorable. They ambushed Israel from behind, massacring the stragglers at the back of the exodus, which would be the pregnant women, the little children, those people who were disabled in any fashion. According to Deuteronomy 25:17, 18. It was a cowardly attack. To be sure by the most powerful and savage group of people in the region of Canaan.

Well, God supernaturally delivered Israel that day coming out of the exodus. And the Amalekites actually fled into hiding. At the conclusion of that battle, God swore to Moses - Exodus 17:14 - "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amulek from under heaven." And he actually, God did, made it a point of the Mosaic Law that this was to occur." In Deuteronomy where, of course, you remember the law is repeated, part of the law Deuteronomy 25:17-19, has to do with the destruction of those people.

Remember what Amulek did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. How he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary. You didn't fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies in the land which the Lord your God gives you an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amulek from under heaven. You must not forget. They were treacherous people, they were deadly warriors. Their intimidating presence was one of the reasons the Israelites disobeyed God and balked at entering the Promised Land and Ketish Varneer.

You remember in Numbers 13 when they came to the border of Ketish Varneer. They were to go into the land, they were fearful and panicky, intimidated in part by the people of Amulek. God's anger was great against these Amalekites because of their severe wickedness. He even called that corrupt prophet Balaam, according to Numbers 24, to prophesied their doom. So God had declared this repeatedly. They were a real problem even when the people finally went into the land, according to Judges 6, they would come along and destroy their crops, which was devastating because that's their source of living. That's their income. They hated God, they detested Israel, they delighted in violence and they were wicked people.

It was because of that and because of the ongoing threat they were to the people of Israel that God called on Saul to fulfill the vow of destruction that had been given back in the time of the pentitude. Back in Exodus and back in Deuteronomy. It was time to act. Enough prophesies. Now it's time to act.

Saul and his armies were to be the instrument through which God would finally carry out His judgment, His holy execution of this sinister tribe.

So Samuel says to Saul in these three verses, "Do this thing, which God wants done." Saul then went to battle, came to the city of Amulek - verse 5 - set an ambush in the valley. Jumping down to verse 7: "Saul defeated the Amalekites from Hevalah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt." God gave him a great victory, a great triumph. A crushing defeat.

And he captured Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive. And that only destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword but Saul and the people spared Agag. And the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs and all that was good and were not willing destroy them utterly but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. Saul did not do what God told him to do. He was motivated by covetousness. He kept all the best of the animals, all the best possessions of the Amalekites. He collected all the spoils of victory, willfully disobeying the Lord's command and he spared Agag. Why would he do that? Maybe to be used as a trophy, to humiliate publicly, to show his own great and mighty superiority motivated by pride. He wanted to make a mockery out of Agag.

But the sin of disobedience was so serious that God deposed Saul immediately. Verse 23: "For rebellion is as the sin of divination and insubordination is as inequity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord he has also rejected you from being king." It was the end. He was rejected from being king. That was it. Verse 32, Samuel comes and says, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully.

And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness has passed. You don't have to fear death." But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless" - that'll tell you a little bit about this reign of terror that the Amalekites were on - "as your sword has made women childless so shall your mother be childless among women and Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgoh." That is an amazing scene. He hacked him to pieces before the Lord at Gilgoh. Sickening, amazing, astonishing.

It was however what God had commanded. Not necessarily in that fashion. But Samuel was making a statement of what ought to have been done by Saul. It cost Saul his kingship. God commanded it to be done and Samuel being faithful to God stepped in and did it. Unlike Saul and the rest of the Israelites, Samuel carried out the Lord's command. The battle that was supposed to have exterminated the Amalekites, didn't do it.

By the time Samuel got to Agag, there were some other Amalekites still around. In fact, Scripture records that only a few years later this tribe has grown, they reappear - turn to 1 Samuel 30 - the reappear in the time of David who follows Saul and Solomon. And in chapter 30, we find again - verse 1 - David and his men come to Ziclago on the third day that the Amalekites have made a raid on the Negev and on Ziclago and overthrown Ziclago and burned it with his father. They took captive of the

women and all who were in it both small and great without killing anyone. And carried them off and went their way, turning them into slaves. Of course, when David and his men came to the city, behold it was burned with fire. Their wives, their sons, their daughters have been taken captive and David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Here is this group of people still around, still creating havoc.

Even David's two wives - verse 5 says - have been taken captive. And David was profoundly distressed. You drop down to verse 16, "When he had brought him down, behold they were spread all over the land eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoils they had taken from the land of the philistines and from the land of Judah, and David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day. And not a man of them escaped except 400 young men who rode of camels and fled." So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken and rescued his two wives.

And finally David tries his hand at obliterating the Amalekites. Didn't get them all. Five centuries later one of them appears. He is an Agagite, related to Agag. His name is Himan. And he is in the book of Esther, the one plotting the destruction of the Jews. Boy, they were a problem. Because they weren't killed in the first place, their reign of terror went on and on and on and on.

All of that to say this: this makes an excellent sort of analogy, this historic pictures of amulet. An excellent illustration of sin in the believer's life. Sin must be dealt with ruthlessly. It must be obliterated. It must be utterly defeated. It must be hacked to pieces or it will revive and it will continue and it will come back to plunder your heart and again and again and again and sap your spiritual strength and rob you of your virtue. And you cannot be merciful with Agag, and you cannot be merciful with amulet or he will turn and multiply and come back to devour.

In fact, once sin has been dealt certain blows it seems as if it comes back more fiercely determined after being overthrown than ever. Scripture calls on us to deal with sin the way God told Saul to deal with amulet. To deal with sin the way Samuel dealt with Agag. To deal with sin the way with David dealt with the remnant of the Amalekites. To deal with sin the way God finally dealt with Himan, hanging him on his own gallows. If we're in a battle for sin, we're in a battle that is going to be fought at a very serious level.

Let's turn to Romans 8 and sort of reconnect with this constructed epistle and not in detail. But I want to draw you to verses 12 and 13. And I just want to pull out of this a very simple idea here that is given to us. In verse 12, we are no longer under obligation to the flesh. We know that. We are no longer obligated to live according to the flesh. We can now live according to the spirit. We are now new creations. We are no longer under the tyranny of sin, the dominion of sin.

Verse 13: "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But if you're living by the spirit, you are putting to death the deeds of the body. You have life." Believers are aggressively putting to death

the deeds of the body. That simply means that remaining sin. Sins are like Amalekites. They have a way of escaping the slaughter, and they have a way of breeding and multiplying and reviving and launching a new and an unexpected assault on our most vulnerable areas.

According to Romans 6, we have a victory over sin. And yet in chapter 7, we have an ongoing struggle with sin. And now we come into chapter 8 where we are told that we're going to have to take some serious action regarding sin and that is to kill it. To put it to death. To deal a deathblow. The distinctive behavior of those who are saved and triumphant over sin and those who are new creations in Christ is that they're continually putting the evil deeds to death. The old King James says mortifying them.

Paul is saying it is characteristic of a true believer, to kill sin. The true believer is not like Saul. The true believer doesn't wanna pamper and preserve Agag. The true believer has a Samuel mentality, wants to hack sin to piece without mercy. He knows that we can't tame the flesh. Can't. Very important to understand that. You can't tame it. You can't really turn it into something gentile and manageable. You have to kill it. You have to strike deathblows to the flesh. There is no other way but to hack to pieces those sins that threaten us.

Listen to what Jesus said: "If your right hands makes you stumble, cut it off, throw it away." Better that you should lose a part of your body than your whole body going to hell. He's saying deal with sin dramatically, deal with sin decisively, deal with sin finally, deal with sin terminally. Jesus is not calling for physical mutilation. He's calling for mortification of sin.

Now when learned in chapter 7 that when you become a believer you're not gonna be immediately free from sin's harassment. In fact, you're gonna find you're living in a conflict you knew nothing about before you became a Christian. And he doesn't say to us, like some people would advocate, well, now to live this Christian life and to get victory of sin, you sort of relax and let go and let God. That's sort of the quietest view. He doesn't say, "Well, you need to come to a point of rededication of your life." He doesn't even say that you need to love Christ more, though that is certainly true. He says you've got to serious and aggressive and kill the deeds of the body. He's not talking about some monastic deprivation. He's certainly not talking about some middle age mutilation. He's not talking at all about external self-punishment. He's talking about dealing with sin.

We've got to mortify sin. Now we wanna talk about that a little bit. Now let me just give you some things to think about first of all. Sin is not mortified when it is merely covered up. You can hide it from somebody else. That's not killing it. You can take Agag and you can put him in a closet but he's still there. If a sin has simply been covered over with hypocrisy, that doesn't do any good. If you conceal your transgressions - Proverbs 28:13 says you will not prosper. Those transgressions that you're hiding, that you're covering, that you're not letting your wife or your husband or your kids or your close friends or your people in the church see if they're there and they're alive and they're flourishing under

the visible surface, you haven't done anything to deal with those sins at all and they're gonna come back in a very destructive way. No, sin is not mortified when it is merely covered up.

Another thing to think about, sin is not mortified when it is only - I guess you could say - internalized. If somehow you say, well I don't do that anymore, I don't practice that evil anymore, and yet in your mind you ruminate on the memory of that sin's pleasures, you haven't killed it. You may have simply moved your sin out of the public world into the private world, which is tied to that first statement about covering it up. You may have moved your sin into the privacy of your imagination, where it is known to God and to you and that doesn't kill it because it is in your imagination that lust conceives and eventually brings forth sin and produces death.

You know, Jesus said it's not enough to kill, you shouldn't hate. Or you're a murderer in your heart. It's not enough not to commit adultery. You shouldn't lust in your heart or you're the same as committing adultery. Sin is not mortified when it's merely covered up. Sin is not mortified when you stop doing it and you internalize it. Well, there's actually more.

Sin is not mortified when it is exchanged for another sin. There are a lot of people who think, well, I don't do that anymore, but they got a new one. That's not helpful. What good is it to trade the lust of the flesh for the lust of the eyes? What good is it to trade the lust of the eyes for an evil tongue? Lust is chameleon-like. It'll change forms. It'll change shape and sin is that way as well. It'll morph into all kinds of other things.

It was Thomas Fuller, the Puritan, who said, "Some think themselves improved in piety because they have left prodigality and gone into covetousness." That's no improvement. "This is simply the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrews 3:13. No, sin is not mortified when it's just exchanged for another sin. "Oh, I don't do that sin anymore, I am over that," and you got another on in its place. That's not the idea. Sin is not mortified until the conscience has been appeased. Now we're getting into the real issue here. Sin is not mortified until the conscience has been appeased.

You see the goal is to - according to 1 Timothy 1:5 - "is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." As long as your conscience remains defiled, as long as your conscience is screaming about sin, you haven't dealt with it. 1 Peter 3 says, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Make him not only Lord of the visible life but of the invisible heart, the private place. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you for gentleness and reverence and keep a good conscience."

You're beginning to kill sin when Jesus is not only Lord of the outside, but clearly Lord of the inside. When you are no longer being eaten up by guilt, when you are no longer having a plaguing, accusing conscience. And if you wanna mortify sin, John Owen, the Puritan wrote, "Load your conscience with the guilt of it." Load your conscience, be honest enough to load your conscience with guilt - that's

essential - then you see who you really are and what you really need to do to mortify sin.

The pangs of guilt - contrary to what psychology would tell you - the pangs of guilt are the right, healthy, natural consequence of sin. That's a gift from God. Guilt is a gift from God. It tells you you're sinning. Just like pain is a gift from God. It tells you got a physical problem so you don't go on harming your body. Guilt tells you you have a spiritual problem so you don't go on harming your soul.

You can't just give some kind of nod to sin and go on your way saying, "Well, I'm under grace. I'm not gonna worry about it." Load your conscience with the guilt of your sin. And then deal with your sin until your conscience is pacified.

It's easy for people to repress sin and just make torment out of their conscience. You lose all your joy, all the peace, all the assurance of your salvation. You begin to live a lie. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote, "If you merely repress the temptation or this first motion of sin within you, it'll probably come up again more strongly." To that extent, I agree with the modern psychologist. Repression is always bad. Well, what do you, asks someone. I answer, when you feel that first motion of sin, just pull yourself up and say, "Of course I am not having any dealings with this at all." Expose the thing and say "this is evil, this is vileness, this is the thing that drove the first man out of paradise." Pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is, then you begin to really deal with it. You must not merely push it back in a spirit of fear, a timorous manner, bring it out, expose it, analyze it, denounce it, until you have hated it. Sound advice.

See, you have to deal with sin by striking it at the head. Subduing it isn't gonna work. You have to exterminate it, hack it in piece as I have been saying.

Now there's a lot more to say about this. Let's talk about how you really do that. Let me give you some things to think about. I'll just give you a handful of principals. These are all Biblical. Turn to 1 Peter 2. How are we gonna do this in a practical way? And there's no secret here, folks, really no secret. All these means of mortification, all these ways to deal with sin, to kill it, are simple commands of Scripture that we are to obey and they assume we have the nature to obey them and the power of the spirit to obey them.

You are not gonna annihilate sin through legalism, superficial rules, Phariseeism. You're not gonna annihilate sin through monasticism, isolation, monkish behavior. You're not gonna eliminate sin through pietism, some hard labor approach to becoming holy. Or through asectism, which is self-denial. You're not gonna eliminate sin through celibacy, through self flagellation, through confessional booths or rosary beads of Hail Marys or any other kind of thing.

The instrument of mortification is obedience to the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the commands are simple. Here's one. Number one: 1 Peter 2:11: "I urge as aliens and strangers to

abstain from fleshly lust, which wage war against the soul." Now we already know we got a war going on in there. We have this new life incarcerated in unredeemed flesh. The battle is on. This is the war that's being waged in our souls. And he simply says, "Abstain from fleshly lust." Simply ways to say it: stop lusting. Stop lusting. It's a lot like 1 Corinthians 6:18: "Flee immorality." If you're engaged in immorality, go the other way. Run the other direction. This assumes that as a believer you have the resources to do that. You want to put to death the lust in your heart, you want to put to death sin, then run from its lusts.

Peter doesn't say, "Well, you need a prolonged period of therapy. You have gotten yourself into an addiction that's gonna take an awful lot to undo." He says, "Quit lusting. Stop it. Put it away." And, by the way, this is a command to us, you and myself. "Beloved, stop lusting in your flesh." He doesn't say, "Sit around and hope some heavenly power will come down and erase your lust or chase it away." Or somebody will come along with some power and cast out the demon of lust. Simple, straightforward command. Stop doing this. And of course it's predicated on the fact that we are no longer, according to Romans 6:12, under the power of sin as the dominant force. That's why Romans 6:12 says, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lust. Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of righteousness." Same thing. Stop doing it. Stop it.

I mean this isn't hard to figure out. Stop it. James 4:7: "Submit to God. Resist the devil. Draw an ear to God. Cleanse your hands. Purify your heart." These are the kinds of commands the Bible gives us.

Let me give you a second one. Turn to Romans 13 - and I think we have time to get a handful of these in - Romans 13:14, positive statement: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" - that is conform to him - "and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust." Now if you're gonna stop lusting - here's the second thing. Number one, abstain from fleshly lust - 1 Peter 2:11. Number two, make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust. If you're going to stop lusting then you have to refuse to accommodate fleshly lusts.

I mean it's just simple. If you struggle with gluttony, then go to the market with a massive basket, grocery basket and go directly to the junk food section and then take it all home and try to prevent yourself from eating it. If you struggle with lust then don't turn things on the television or the Internet or whatever other source that you have that are going to feed that. Don't fill your mind with images that feed your lust. If you don't wanna fall then don't walk where it's slippery.

You really need to refuse to furnish your mind with the means to entertain evil thoughts. I mean you just, it's that easy. Stop lusting means stop providing the stuff that generates that lusting. You have to stop sin before it starts. You have to deal with it in the heart or you're never going to be able to deal with it in your life. This is not something we don't know about. It's just something we need to be reminded of. In James 4: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" We get into



trouble. We have fights and we have quarrels.

And, you know, as people we argue and we have squabbles and conflict exists even among believers in churches, in families, in marriages. Among young people and old people and middle-age people. And where does it come from? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have. And so you get so angry you actually commit murder, you're envious, you can't obtain, you fight, you quarrel. All of this comes because of your lusts. It's because you want something, you desire something and somebody stands in your way and that's what causes conflict. If you try to deal with the conflict at the level of the conflict it only indicates that you're not dealing at the source level, which is envy, jealousy, evil desire, seeking pleasure, wanting your way, wanting your will.

James 1:14: "You're tempted when you're carried away and enticed by your lust." As I said, it's lust that conceives, gives birth to sin. Sin produces death. So if you're gonna abstain from lust then you have to make no provision for the flesh regarding lust.

Now let me turn back to that Romans 13:14 to the positive: "Fix your heart on the Lord Jesus Christ." Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the focus of your life be on Christ, on His person and His glory and His cross and His love for you and His forgiveness of your sin and His will and His desire for your best and His promise of eternal life. In other words, focus on Him. Look at 1 John 3 where it says that if we, who are the children of God know that when He appears - 1 John 3:2 - "We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure."

If you want something that'll purify your heart focus on Christ, on Christ coming, appearing, and making us like Him. The focus of the life of a believer is what can I think, what can I say, what can I do, what can I imagine that will make me like Christ? This is a part of gazing into His glory and being transformed into His image. 2 Corinthians 3:18. This is not gonna happen in a vacuum, fixing your heart on Jesus Christ.

There is an inextricable spiritual law that you become like the object your worship. Psalm 1:35 says, "The idols of the nations are but silver and gold. The work of man's hands. They have mouths but they do not speak. They have eyes but they do not see. They have ears but they do not hear. Nor is there any breath at all in their mouths" - listen to this - "those who make them will be like them. Yes, everyone who trusts in them." That's how it is. You have an idol, you become like your idol. If the heathen become like the lifeless gods they worship, how much more will we become like the Christ was worship when we have the spirit of Christ operating in us to accomplish that very goal. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord of being transformed into that same image from glory to glory just as from the Lord the spirit."

The more you worship, the more you conform to Christ. The more you read about Christ, study about Christ, the more you commune with Christ, the more you praise Christ, the more you sing songs and hymns of praise to Him, the more you look at the cross and consider His death on your behalf and the glory of heaven prepared for you, the more Christ conscious you become, the more you are moving out, pushing out any provision for the flesh that will lead to the lust of the flesh.

And obviously a fourth thing to consider - this also on the positive side - meditate on God's word, meditate on God's word. When I sign the study Bibles, which I do all the time, I often will write Joshua 1:8, because it's just a very good reminder to all of us about the priority of the word of God. Listen to what it says: "The book of the law" - Scripture - "shall not depart from your mouth but you should meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have success." Spiritually, it's about meditating on the law of God day and night and being careful to do according to all that is written in it.

We're back to John 17:17: "Sanctify them by thy truth. Thy word is truth." And of course Psalm 119. This magnificent psalm, Psalm 119 has so many verses that emphasizes this point. Verse 11 is good enough. "Thy word have I treasured in my heart that I may not sin against thee." A word-filled heart leaves no place for sin. Meditate on the word of God.

One of my favorite psalms, Psalm 19, very much the same: "Let the words of my mouth" - verse 14 - "the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, o Lord, my rock and my redeemer." And when that is true, you will be kept back from presumptuous sins and they will not rule over you and you shall be blameless and acquitted of great transgression. It is to be preoccupied with the word of God.

You know, I tell you, I have great sadness in my heart for those churches where the word of God does not dominate, where the word of God does not prevail. Because I know people cannot, God's people, cannot win this spiritual battle in a God-honoring, Christ-glorifying way without being saturated by the word of God. And so what happens is people are cheated out of the means of their own spiritual joy, victory, peace and assurance. To say nothing of pastors and preachers who aren't in the word either and who are therefore unable to have victory in their own lives. Consequently the sad tragedies of failing ministers who bring dishonor on Christ for their sins. Load your mind with the word of God. Fill your heart with the word of God. Ponder it carefully. Let it direct your thinking, dominate your thinking. This is Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, whatever is of good report. If there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think on these things," or let your mind dwell on these things.

Or in the words of Paul in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Or maybe we can mix our stories a little bit. Take Paul's words that you need to have the sword of the spirit, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, is the tool with which you hack Agag to pieces.

And there's a fifth to consider, and that's pray. Your life should be an open communion. Your life should be an open communion. We're not talking about repeating prayers. Jesus spoke of that and spoke strongly against it. Vain repetition. We're not talking about public praying. You're told by our Lord himself to go into your closet in private and speak to God. We're not talking about some kind of event. We're talking about a constant open communication to God. Direct me, lead me, keep me pure, keep my heart right. A flow upward all the time. Prayer is a preemptive strike against the flesh. This is how you draw nearer to the Lord. This is how you center on Him. Prayer, in a sense, I guess, garrisons us against sin and weakens temptation that comes to us.

I guess in a sense you can say when temptation comes, report immediately to the commander-in-chief and you do that in prayer. Hebrews 4:16: "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. There's no greater time of need than the time of temptation."

Let me just give you two more things to think about. Would be this number six? Develop self-control, cultivate self-control. This is so very, very important, cultivating self-control. When I talk about self control, I'm talking about it in the sense of let's turn to 1 Corinthians 9. The kind of thing that Paul talks about here. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:25, "Everyone who competes in the games" - he's talking about athletics. This is obviously one of Paul's favorite kind of metaphors - "everyone who competes in the games exercises self control in all things." I mean we all understand that. You don't compete, let's say, in the Olympic games or any other great athletic event if you're out of shape.

One of the things that athletes have, and whatever their motivations, their motivations seem to be today pretty crass or pretty personal. Self-aggrandizement, self-fulfillment, self-promotion, etc. Not much going on anymore for the good of the team. But whatever the motive is if you're gonna compete in the game, you need to exercise self-control because you have to be fit. And they do it, Paul says even then they did it, to receive a perishable wreath. But we \_\_\_\_\_ imperishable. I mean we're pictured as athletes in a competition. And he says this is true. I run in such a way as not without aim. I'm not just rambling around. I'm not a jogger, I like that. I'm not a jogger. I'm the same way. What are you running for? There's no finish line. What's the point? I mean what are you running - I see all these people running, running, running. The only time I ever ran was when the gun went off and there was a finish line and a medal. Forget the rest. We have a whole world of people running nowhere for nothing. I mean it's like playing basketball with no hoops. Just run, run, run, run.

Then he says I'm not that kind of runner. I'm not just running around. I'm not a spiritual jogger. And I, he says, I don't box in such a way to beat the air. I just don't go down there to the gym and just hit the air. You know, I'm dealing with a real opponent here. I'm in a real race. I'm running against the flesh. I'm boxing the flesh. And in verse 27 he says, "I buffet my body." Isn't that fascinating? It's the same word as buffet spelled the same way. But he's not saying I buffet my body. Some of you do. And at

some time we all do.

One of the quirky things about the English language. I buffet my body. It's a word that basically means to give it a black eye. To hit it with a blow. And I make it my slave so that I don't, in preaching to others myself, become disqualified. *Adaquimas*. this buffet thing, this buffet, *upuquiadzo*. Means literally to strike under the eye. He says I have to develop control over this body. I cannot let my body control me, I have to control it to get the upper hand. This is a watchful, self-discipline, that refuses to pander to the appetites of the body at the soul's expense.

Listen, Luke 21:34: "Jesus said be on guard that your hearts may not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life. And the day of Lord come on you suddenly like a trap." If you don't wanna live your life like a fat cat schlepping your way through without any discipline.

There is a real need for disciplining your own body so you don't disqualify yourself in the spiritual struggle. And, of course, we can't leave out the seventh one: be filled with the spirit. "Be not drunk with wine in which is excess" - Ephesians 5 - "but be filled with the spirit." This takes us back to Romans 8. Let's go back there. We sort of started there and we're gonna end there. Romans 8. In this mortifying, this putting to death the deeds of the body. Says in Romans 8:13, "By the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body." Is the spirit's power in us and so we are yielded to the spirit. That means we are desirous of the spirit leading us. We are submissive to the spirit as he has revealed himself in the word of God.

We don't endeavor to do this in our own strength but submitting to the spirit of God. "Remembering" - Philippians 2:13 - "it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." There's a humility here. There's a desperation here. There's a crying out to the spirit of God to do for us what must be done.

So we're talking about critical things. We're talking about abstaining from lust of the flesh. To do that you have to not make any provision for the lust of the flesh. On the positive side, you fix your eyes on Jesus. You meditate on God's word. You pray in an unceasing way. You develop self-control, bringing your body into submission. And you yield continually to the power and the will of the spirit of God.

Now we could cover a lot of other things. 1 Peter 5:5 says, "Clothe yourself with humility." Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Cultivate the mind of Christ. Ephesians 6:10-17 says, "Put on the armor of God." Colossians 3:8, 9 says, "Lay aside sinful attitudes." 2 Peter 1 says, "Add the graces of spiritual growth." But they're all ways to get at the same thing. And I guess the sum of it is in the 2 Corinthians 7: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." What drives all of this is a fear of God. Not just an inordinate terror. We're not talking about that. It is fear in the sense of reverence.

What drives all of it. What makes me want to abstain from fleshly lust. Make no provision for the lust. Fix my eyes on Christ. Meditate on the word. Open my heart as a channel constantly communing with the Lord. Depend on the Holy Spirit is my reverence for God, my love for God, my worship to God.

Sin is very subtle. It's very powerful. It hides, it lies dormant. And if it's not killed it comes back stronger than ever. It may leave you alone for a little while. Make you think it's gone. It'll come back with hellish fury. Sin is a stalker. You can never rest in the conflict. It has to be dealt with. And when we deal with that sin, we enjoy the vest, the fullness, the richness of all that God has for us.

Well, that's enough for tonight. Now next time we're going to look at a very positive approach to this spiritual struggle. And that is specifically how we focus our lives on the last point. Living in the fear of God, the reverence of God, letting the whole focus of my life be to glorify God. We're gonna show you some rich things about that that have really shaped my entire life, and that's next Sunday night.

Lord, we are, again, the recipients of your truth. And we know that we have done nothing to earn it, to gain it, to deserve it. It is just sheer sovereign grace that has opened our minds, given us life, and the ability to apprehend, to know, to believe, to love and to apply your word. And we thank you again tonight for its richness. We thank you for its work in us. We thank you that it is alive and powerful and it is the sharpest sword we have to use in killing remaining sin. And we do that for your glory and our blessing and for the testimony that a holy life has to those who are watching. And we commit this truth and its unfolding usefulness to us to the spirit who alone can conform us to that which pleases you. In the name of Christ. Amen.

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