

Principled Living (Part Two): Conquering Sin

Declaring Total War on Sin

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I probably do not need to tell you how terrible cancer is. Many of us have been personally affected by it, either in having cancer ourselves or a family member having cancer. In the U.S., it is the second leading cause of death. About half of American men and just over a third of American women will develop cancer during their lifetimes. Today, millions of people are living with cancer or have gone into remission. The *American Cancer Society*, which I used to get some statistics, had this to say about this horrible and deadly group of diseases:

Cancer develops when cells in a part of the body begin to grow out of control. Although there are many kinds of cancer, they all start because of out-of-control growth of abnormal cells. Normal body cells grow, divide, and die in an orderly fashion. Once a person reaches maturity, cells in most parts of the body divide only to replace worn out or dying cells and to repair injuries. Because cancer cells continue to grow and divide, they are different from normal cells; instead of dying, they outlive normal cells and continue to form new abnormal cells. Cancer cells develop because of damage to DNA. Most of the time when DNA becomes damaged, the body is able to repair it. In cancer cells, the damaged DNA is not repaired. People can inherit damaged DNA, which accounts for inherited cancers. More often, though, a person's DNA becomes damaged by exposure to something in the environment—like smoking.

Cancer usually forms as a tumor. Some cancers like leukemia do not form tumors. Instead, these cancer cells involve the blood and blood forming organs and circulate through other tissues where they grow. Often, cancer cells travel to other parts of the body where they begin to grow and replace normal tissue. This process is called metastasis. Curative surgery is the removal of the tumor

when it appears to be confined to one area. It is done when there is hope of taking out all of the cancer. It may be used alone or along with chemotherapy or radiation therapy, which can be given before or after the operation. In some cases radiation therapy is actually used during an operation, and this is called "intra-operative radiation therapy." Debulking, or cytoreductive surgery, is done when removing a tumor entirely would cause too much damage to an organ or the surrounding areas. In these cases, the doctor may remove as much of the tumor as possible, and then try to treat what is left with radiation therapy or chemotherapy.

Obviously, there is a great deal more to be said about cancer. However, I wish to draw attention to these surgical cures. When a surgeon performs this operation, his mission is to get every single cancer cell in the affected area—because if he does not, it is very likely that the cancer will just come back. The cell that is left there will grow and divide again and continue to make these abnormal cells which will then, themselves, continue to grow and divide. The cancer comes back. It is that insidious. These cancer cells, if they are not entirely eradicated, will continue to multiply and will eventually kill the patient.

If you have not made the obvious comparison or connection already, cancer is very much like sin.

If we wish to live abundant lives, we must completely eradicate the sin in us; or it will find a way to resurge and cause us great pain. As we know spiritually from Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death," speaking of the second death. This second sermon in my series on principled living will emphasize conquering sin. I want to stress the conquering aspect of this throughout this sermon—conquering and completely eradicating sin.

Because this is the First Day of Unleavened Bread, please turn with me to Exodus 12. I want to tie this in with the day and the whole festival. This is God's instruction to Moses and to all of Israel for their first keeping of Unleavened Bread.

Exodus 12:15-20 "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For

whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation [which we are doing right now], and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt.

Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening [at day's end], you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening [at day's end—we are supposed to start at the end of the fourteenth, which is the beginning of the fifteenth, and continue to the end of the twenty-first, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread]. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land [the second time that the penalty has been mentioned]. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is obviously a memorial of God's bringing Israel out of Egypt. It typifies for us coming out of oppression—coming out of a sinful, anti-God world—but it is not something that we do. Remember, our understanding of the Night to be Much Observed is that God Himself watched over and brought us out. He did all the work. Because He did the work, we have to walk out behind Him; that implies work on our part. Our part is shown here: we must rid ourselves of leavening—a type of sin, corruption—and then we must eat unleavened bread, which is a type of living righteously, which we will get to in my next sermon. At this time of year, God wants us to take special care to think about our lives at this particular juncture. The apostle Paul tells us,

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

We are to think about it seriously. What have we done to rid ourselves of sin? How have we grown? What is our situation now compared to a year ago? Five years ago? Ten years ago? When we were first called? Have we made any progress? Is there a sin that is still bugging us, testing us, causing us to fall?

God has provided a way to escape from the clutches of Satan and this present evil world and the destructive effects of sin. He wants us at this time, once we have evaluated our lives, to rededicate ourselves to this fight against sin, to the putting of leaven out of our lives. This fight to which we have to rededicate ourselves is what I am going to be calling *total war*. It is a fight against sin and all of its forms. It is like the surgeon who goes in to excise the cancer totally. It is to carry the battle to its very heart and to annihilate every last vestige of sin, to mop it up, to leave no trace of it to resurge and tempt and terrorize us again.

Turn to I Corinthians 5. First, I will be reading this in the New King James Version, and then later I want to read this in another translation. Paul writes,

I Corinthians 5:1-8 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

To really understand what Paul is saying here, we have to realize the depth of the wickedness of the sin among the Corinthians: A man was having sexual relations (whether married or not) with his father's wife. This, Paul says, is so venal, so vile, as to be unmentionable even among the Gentiles, who, if you have read any of the history of the time were pretty permissive in sexual matters, even to the point of ritual prostitution—and this is not the worst of it! The problem here was the pride of the congregation: they had become puffed up about their reaction to this sin. Instead of being grieved about it, instead of taking quick and decisive action to get that guy out of the church so that he would not corrupt anyone else, they were proud of their restraint—proud of their loving concern—proud of their tolerance! They just let the cancer grow.

As I said, this common translation does not do justice to Paul's strength of argument, of language, his commanding tone. I want to read this from the New Testament in Modern English, also known as the Phillips Translation.

I Corinthians 5:1-8 (*New Testament in Modern English*) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, an immorality of a kind that even pagans condemn—a man has apparently taken his father's wife! And are you still proud of yourselves? Should you not be overwhelmed with sorrow? The man who has done such a thing should certainly be expelled from your fellowship. I know that I am not there with you physically, but I am with you in spirit. And I assure you, as though I were actually with you, that I have already pronounced judgment in the Name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done this thing!

As one present in spirit when you are assembled, I say by the power of the Lord Jesus, that the man should be left to the mercy of Satan so that while his body will experience the destructive powers of sin, his spirit may yet be saved in the day of the Lord. Your pride in yourselves is lamentably out of place. Do you not know that a little yeast can permeate the whole lump? Clear out every bit of the old yeast that you may be new unleavened bread. We Christians have had a Passover Lamb sacrificed for us, none other than Christ Himself! So, let us keep the Feast [of Unleavened Bread] with no trace of the yeast of the old life, nor the yeast of

vice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of unadulterated truth.

That is much more powerful than what the New King James said! I want to focus a bit on this word *purge* in verse 7, as in "therefore, purge out the old leaven. . ." This word in the Greek is *ekkathairo*, and it means, simply, "to clean out thoroughly." *Thoroughly* does not mean just "to clean up." It means to clean out **thoroughly**. The emphasis here is on the cleansing of all abomination, all filth, all impurity; getting everything out, just as the cancer surgeon would try to get every cell; cleaning up the entire area. This means to rid or remove completely. The emphasis here is on *thoroughly*—all, completely, everything. A cancer surgeon's mission, his intent, is to purge the body of cancer completely; to cut and scour every last cell from the affected area. Our mission is to do the same thing with sin. Get in there with scalpel and suction and whatever else it takes to get every last bit of sin out.

I have used the cancer imagery quite extensively; I would like to change now to the idea of total war. Deuteronomy 20 is a series of instructions that Israel was given by God to govern their use of warfare. We will begin in verse 10 because the first parts of this chapter do not fit the subject quite as well. I want you to notice the levels of warfare that are mentioned here.

Deuteronomy 20:10-18 "When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.

And when the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. [Notice that there is no trace of doubt there.] But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the LORD your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations.

But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God."

Did you notice the levels? A very far away city (not of the seven nations listed) was treated differently, more leniently from the nearby cities within the Promised Land. We can see a spiritual analogy here: The closer the sin is to us, the more harshly we must deal with it. Notice that at no time in these three levels of warfare—moving this from the physical warfare to the warfare against sin—at no time is there any tolerance of sin.

Even for the city that is besieged and strikes terms with Israel (this is the first level), they were given very little leniency. They were placed under tribute, and the people were forced to serve Israel. They became Israel's slaves and tributary people. Thus, even if the far-away enemy comes to terms, it is still enslaved and put under our control. In the analogy, this sin is forced to conform to God's standards.

The next one is a far-away city that puts up a fight. It is subdued, and every strength of that city is decimated—wiped out totally. We subdue this sin, and ensure that it lacks the power to ever wage war against us again. I do not want to take this too far, but this "far-away city" might be someone else's sin with which you are forced to deal. If the person decides to submit, then he submits according to certain guidelines. However, if he fights, then we are allowed to take harsher measures. It might come to the point where we must cut off all communication with such a person.

The next level is right close to home: within ourselves. Total war is reserved for that which is closest—within our midst—within us. There we are commanded to take no prisoners—literally.

He says to let nothing that breathes remain alive. We are to *utterly destroy* this sin. As verse 18 warns, it will return to whisper its wicked way in our

ears and turns us from God. God is serious about sin! Remember that Israel was a type from which we are to learn. They were to be examples that give us hope and object lessons to teach us how to react or respond when these things come up—and they will.

These are certainly repugnant measures that we must take; nobody of our time likes to think of total war. That was barbaric, we think, to just totally destroy a people and all their civilization; but this was the very command that God gave to Israel to do to those who were inhabiting the Promised Land. They could not let one breathing thing live. These things certainly are repugnant to us, but sin is even more repulsive to God. These harsh measures are nothing to the abomination that sin is to God. He wants it absolutely destroyed. Notice the wording in Proverbs:

Proverbs 15:8-10 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness. Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die.

As I said, God takes sin seriously. He wants it destroyed! He cannot stand it; He will not abide it in His presence. If we wish to be like Him, if we wish to be near Him for all eternity, then we have to get rid of it. We have to purge it. We have to clean it up thoroughly. We have to remove it completely—all abomination, all filth, all impurity, all sin, all corruption. It has got to go!

As it says in verse 10, it requires harsh correction. If we fail to harshly correct ourselves, if we do not have the stuff—the stomach—to scour our lives of sin, then we will die the second death. God is not going to put up with any type of rebellion, of sin, of non-conformity to His way of life. Thus, if we do not commit to total war against sin that is still working in our hearts, known or secret, we have a dire problem on our hands. We cannot let it fester; we cannot let it grow like a cancer.

How many times have you heard of a person who you knew was not well but just could not figure out what the problem was? You come to find out that he is tested for cancer; and they find cancer, but it is so far along that he is just as good as dead. He might last a week, and then he is dead. We cannot let

that happen with us in terms of sin. We have to be testing ourselves often to see where the corruption is and what needs to be excised thoroughly and completely so that it does not kill us.

Do you think that I am overstating the case? Do you think that this is just hyperbole for effect?

Well, I have some statements from Jesus Christ that if we will really think about them will make our hair curl. Turn to Matthew 5, right within the Sermon on the Mount, right in the section where He is talking about the Law.

Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

Is Jesus just using hyperbole? Is He just using a rhetorical device to get our attention? Do you think that He does not mean this? What is He saying, then?

If we have a sin—for instance lust (using the one that He did)—and in this day and age there are so many opportunities to be caught up in the sin of lust—if it is something that we just cannot shake, we have to be willing to go to these extreme measures to get it out of our lives. It must be rooted out and destroyed entirely, purged, cleansed thoroughly, gotten rid of, or removed completely. No half measures will do. You cannot just get half of the lust; it just does not work that way. It has got to come out, all of it. That is it. It is all got to come out, or it will continue to bother us; it will continue to terrorize us; it will destroy us. We have to learn to be decisive, harsh, and, as Jesus says here, sacrificial. We have to be willing to lose an "eye" or "hand" or whatever it might take to bring the sin under control and to annihilate it thoroughly.

He does not want us to lose a hand or an eye, but what He is telling us here that He wants us to get at the root of the problem. In the illustration here, the eye is a symbol, and the hand is a symbol. The eye is the member of the body that usually inaugurates a man's lust. He sees a pretty woman with a great figure walking down the street, and his imagination kicks into high gear. It was the eye that saw. Jesus says that he has already begun to commit fornication with that woman in his heart—mentally and emotionally.

Therefore, Jesus says that if it takes not looking at a woman to do it, well, pluck out your eye. He is setting up priorities here. It is less of a priority for you to be able to see than it is for you to be free of sin—that is pretty high on the list.

What about the hand—the right hand? The right hand is a man's strong hand, in most cases. That is the hand with which he works, that is the hand that *does*. That is usually the second thing that gets into the act, because he, then, reaches out to that woman; and the sin now has turned from mental and emotional to physical. It has now consumed his entire being, and he is filled with lust. Thus, Jesus says that if you have to cut off your hand in order to keep yourself from following through with such an act, it should be something that you are willing to sacrifice in order to get rid of the sin. As I said, He does not really want you to pluck your eye out or cut your hand off. However, it is a willingness to go the *n* *th* extreme to get rid of the sin. If that is what it takes, that is what it takes.

He has already given us the hint as to where the problem really lies, though. Plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand is not going to keep you from lusting. It will not. You can go around with blinders on all day, but you can still see a woman—you can imagine a woman. It might reduce its occurrence, but Jesus has already identified the place of sin: He says right there in verse 28, "He has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Even though the eye saw, even though the hand reached out and touched, it was his heart that was corrupt. That is where the slash-and-burn total war must take place: in the heart. He does not tell you to cut your heart out. If you do that, then you would die. You would die in your sins, and there would be no hope.

He is telling us that we have to change our minds, change our character by a scorched-earth policy, by total war. That is where the harsh correction must occur: in the heart. We have got to change our habits; we have got to change our thinking. None of this is going to take place without God's help, obviously. Our approach to this has to be like the cancer surgeon. Everything must go. You have to be willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to get rid of the sin.

Using this particular example here in Matthew 5, just what must a man do if he is struggling with this kind of sin? These are the things that he should be thinking about: What must I do to overcome sin, to overcome lust? To get this under control, Jesus is saying that we have to take both physical and spiritual measures. That is what the eye and the hand are. Those are physical measures. Getting to the heart is the spiritual measure. Only God can change the heart, but we have to do what we can.

We can take physical measures to keep the temptations down, to get us out of situations, to make sure that we are doing all we can so that we do not fall back into the temptation as often or at all. As Jesus says, we have to start making sacrifices, cutting things out, getting rid of things—and we have to be absolutely brutal and totally uncompromising.

First, if a man is in this situation and has a problem with lust, he has to avoid situations that are conducive to his lust. For instance, if he goes to bars, he does not go to bars anymore. He stops drinking all together. Those are not the kinds of places to meet girls. If he dabbles in pornography in any way, that is the first thing that he needs to get rid of. If he needs to, throw his computer out! Never get near one of those magazines or materials again. These are things that have to be ripped out of a person's life.

If he likes to go to the beach or pool with binoculars, he has to put his binoculars away and stay away from the beach or pool. If he likes spring break videos or late Saturday night television, those things must go. If he likes any kind of provocative television or movies, out with them! Magazines? Books? Whatever else that would excite his lust? Out with them! They must go. They must be burned; they must be totally removed from a person's life. Any kind of situation that is going to titillate the boy's or man's lust has to be removed. It must be absolutely brutal and totally

uncompromising. This is total war. Total war, as we saw in Deuteronomy 20, is that anything that breathes dies. You do not leave anything there to remind you of that situation.

Yes, what I mean, men, if this is your problem, is become a hermit, if that is what it takes. I do not quite mean literally, but what I mean is for you to strip your life down to its bare essentials so that this sin does not affect you anymore. What is more important: a little passing excitement, or an eternity of abundant joy in God's Kingdom? This makes the sacrifice so small. What is more important: getting rid of a girlie magazine or sitting with Jesus on His throne? This is the sort of thinking that a man must do to control his lusts—and this is only one thing.

A second thing I have is this: fill that void with a wholesome pursuit that takes up all your time. Engage every spare minute in this wholesome activity. It needs to be something that will engage your mind and body, something that will tire you out so that by the time you go to bed, you fall right to sleep, and you do not even think about these other types of things. I am not kidding. Get busy! Do not allow yourself to have moments where nothing is happening, because your human nature will take you back to the gutter to fill the time. Many people sin out of sheer laziness and boredom, because they are not engaged in something wholesome.

Make something of yourself! Take up a hobby—auto mechanics, model railroading, building websites, or whatever. Do something productive. Get into exercise. Start a weight training regimen. Run marathons. That will take some time and tire you out. Buy a bike and ride a hundred miles to someplace and back. Volunteer at a hospital or some non-profit organization that you support. Start a major project to beautify your house or yard. Take classes at a local college. Read the Bible from cover to cover and then start over again. Do something! Do not give yourself the opportunity to slip back into that sin again.

Acts 10:38 says about Jesus that He went about *doing good*. That is a major key that kept Him sinless! He was always focused on other people and helping them and on getting them the message of the Good News, and

healing, and casting out demons, teaching His disciples, and so on. He was always busy. He did not have time for sin. He gave sin no time in His life. It just was not on His schedule. He purposely scheduled things that way.

Of course, you must do spiritual things as well. These are just physical things to do: 1) Get rid of something, and 2) put something good in its place. The spiritual things are many: Pray diligently and fervently for God's forgiveness and for His help in overcoming this sin. Do you remember, back there in Deuteronomy 20, I mentioned that there was no doubt about Israel conquering the enemy that warred against them? The same is true about conquering sin. There is no doubt that we can conquer any sin as long as God is helping us. We have that positive reinforcement right at the outset. If God is with us, nothing can be against us. You need to have God totally involved in this purging process, because He hates it more than you do. He is willing to put His back behind it in that effort to purge everything.

Study both good and bad examples in the Scriptures. Joseph is a good example of what to do when lust came calling, and then study David and see the bad example of what not to do when lust comes calling. What was he doing out there on the balcony? Did he know that Bathsheba was going to bathe there? Think these things through. David did not vacate the scene. He stayed and started having ideas—and it ruined his mind ever since.

Meditate on why you have this problem. Think about the roots of the problem. Consider what things make you lust. Consider what solutions you can formulate to solve the problem. Think deeply. Take time. Wonder why every woman is an object of desire or plaything to you and not a human with the same equal potential as you to be in God's Family. Think about the long term effects of this. Think about the disaster that it could bring to your family. Think about the diseases that could come as a result of acting upon one's lust. Think about birth defects in children. Think about the example you are setting for others. True Christianity is a thinking man's and woman's religion. We probably do not emphasize meditation enough. However, we need to do this along with study and prayer to get to the root of the problem.

Of course, there is fasting, too. It is not to get something from God; He says that such a fast that is not the kind of fast that He wants. He wants us to fast so that we come out of it with humility of mind, willing to do whatever it

takes to please Him, to see our place before God, to understand His holiness versus our incredible corruption, and to be able to understand, too, how He has given us so much so that we can come out of that state of corruption into His glorious holiness. If we only just cooperate, we also come out of it with the humility to admit our weaknesses, and maybe by that time the problem's root will become exposed if we are willing to sacrifice those things to expose it.

Turn to Colossians 3. Paul is saying that if you are one of those people who have been raised with Christ in baptism and you are a converted person, you are to be seeking these things that are from above, setting your mind on Godly things. Verse 5 is a concluding statement:

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members. . .

Put it to death! Did you hear an echo of something? Moses said it. The writer of Proverbs said it. Jesus said it, and now the apostle Paul is saying it.

Colossians 3:5-10 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

That is such a tall order! Get rid of all these things so that you can come into the image of Jesus Christ, which is our assignment: having the new man formed in us. Such a tall, tall order. Paul says here, just as has been said before, that purging sin is an all-out effort. We are supposed to leave nothing on the table when moving against sin. We cannot conquer sin—we cannot conquer anything—by waging a half-hearted battle. Everything must be thrown into the fight—all the weaponry that is at our disposal plus all that God provides to help us. We have to be ruthless; we have to be fearless; and

we have to be willing to make any sacrifice to cleanse ourselves completely from sin.

Back a few pages in Galatians 5. This is the very next verse after the fruits of the Spirit are listed:

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's [that should be you and I] have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Do you remember the sermon that I gave last week? What did Jesus say that a disciple has to do? Take up his cross, and follow Him. Paul says here in verse 24 that we have to crucify ourselves, our flesh. This ratchets things up one step above "put to death your members." Crucifixion is the most torturous and painful method of execution that mankind has ever devised. It was invented to torture the person, to cause extreme pain. That is where we get the word *excruciation*. It was so painful that they probably could not take a fraction of the pain that it caused.

However, it was not supposed to be painful just to the person going through it. Everyone who saw it felt ghastly—unless they had become hardened to it—especially those who were close to the person. The Romans did this publicly so that the people would know that the Romans would do this to them, too, if they did not toe the line. It was made to be painful, and it was made to be a spectacle of pain and anguish so that people would comply.

This is what we are told we have to do to ourselves in our fight against sin, whatever its form. We have to be willing to go to this same length that our Savior went through to get rid of sin. He expects nothing less of us.

Do you want to be His disciple? Take up your cross. Do you know what you crucify? Yourself, your sins, your flesh, your nature. If we really want to be His, Paul says, we have to crucify our sinfulness—that nature that leads us away from God, away from His Kingdom, away from all the things that He has put out there for us to have in His grace.

Finally, turn to Revelation 21. I want you to see the two sides here. Jesus puts it in stark terms. He makes a stark contrast between the two universal sides—good and evil—God's and not God's—Christ and antichrist.

Revelation 21:1-2 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:7 "He who overcomes [Jesus says] shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."

What a future we have if we are Christ's and if we overcome! He does not say, "those who take out the trash for your wife," or "those who volunteer at the hospital," or "those who put up chairs at church," or "those who give sermons or sermonettes or lead songs," or anything else.

How did He slice and dice this? On the one hand it is the overcomers, the conquerors of sin. What is on the other side?

Revelation 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Then, after He has just described the Holy City:

Revelation 21:22-24 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

Revelation 21:27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Those the two sides. There are sinners who remain in their sin, and there are overcomers. To the overcomers go all of the rewards and the everlasting joys of God's Kingdom: power, rulership, membership in the Family of God, eternal fellowship with the Father and the Son. On the other side is death: annihilation, the end of all things, the Lake of Fire.

It is not hard to choose on which side we want to be, but are we willing to commit to total war to be on the overcoming side, the conquering side? If we desire the latter—to be overcomers and joint heirs with Christ—total war must be our watchword on sin, excising it like a cancer from our bodies, minds, and hearts.

So, to imitating Christ, the first point of principled living, we now add conquering sin. We will get to putting on righteousness next week.