

Christianity Is A Fight! (Part 1)

Crucifying the Flesh

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Given 04-Nov-06; Sermon #799

Hebrews 10:35-36 Cast not away therefore your confidence which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise.

I am going to pick up on the theme of my sermon given on the Last Great Day ["God, the Church's Greatest Problem"], but at the same time I am going to move on to a specific aspect of seeking God that everyone of us has *hard* difficulty with. I will focus on that issue because each of us needs a vision and a great deal of perseverance to overcome it.

Turn forward to Hebrews 11:8, always remembering what we just read in Hebrews 10—"Cast not away therefore your confidence" and that we "have need of patience" in order to persevere.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city.

Seeking God should be one of life's most pleasurable experiences. I am not talking of pleasure in the sense of a thrilling, energy-charged surge of wishful delight, but a steady sustained sense of growing satisfaction and contentment derived from the knowledge of

something of great personal value being accomplished.

There is something we should understand about Abraham's example. That accomplishing of the sense of satisfaction was not easy for him. It required a vision. That is what it says there in Hebrews 11. They "saw"—meaning spiritually. They did not literally see it, but they saw a great goal that they were going for, and he had a vision that motivated sustained efforts. The emphasis is on the word "sustained." It entailed many daily sacrifices while achieving important elements that one cannot easily see.

It says that Abraham and Sarah lived in tents following their being called out. Archeologists have shown us that they departed from quite a sophisticated culture that boasted such things as indoor plumbing. Would you believe it? They had toilets of some kind right in their home. They had water, under pressure, up to the second floor in the buildings they built. The water was delivered right into their home.

The living in tents is to let us know that when they accepted God's call, they gave up considerable luxury, and really a life of ease, at least compared to what they were going into. More importantly, though, is that the tent represented that they never, for the rest of their lives, had a settled existence. They lived a life that seemed constantly on the move. Something was always happening, and not only that, but this constant sense of movement seems to have had no end.

God worked with Abraham for 100 years from the time of his calling. This process that Abraham went through we now share with him. It is not like reaching visible borders or mile markers. Major production in this ever-moving process is difficult, because overcoming character challenges that at one time seemed to be accomplished, somehow or another seem to come back into the picture once again. It sets up a situation that, unless one understands what is going on, can be quite discouraging.

Many times it is like two steps forward and three steps backwards. "Hey! I overcame this before, and here I am, doing it again!" When that goes on often enough, it is enough to drive a person to distraction unless there is something to keep the person going on despite sometimes seemingly lack of progress.

This process has a peculiar twist to it in that the more we learn about God's quality we so much admire and want to be part of our life, the more sharply focused we see our own imperfections; and thus, in some ways it appears that even though we are growing, the gap between what He is and we are becomes ever greater.

The effect of this is somewhat like the illustration God gave Ezekiel when He

commanded him to walk away from the shore into that broad river that flowed from under the altar and represented God's Holy Spirit. The farther Ezekiel got from the shore, the deeper the water became until he could no longer walk in it.

I think this is clearly one of the reasons why Paul said in Romans 7:24, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This was twenty or so years after he was converted. You would think that by that time he would have had accomplished so much, and here he was, calling himself a wretched man. This was because the more he learned about God, and God's perfection, and God's holiness, the dirtier and more wretched he realized he was. He also went on to say, "I thank God, through Christ Jesus, I *shall* be delivered." Even though there was much to give him a sense of discouragement, overall he was confident it was going to be accomplished. Stop again and think about Abraham. This went on for a hundred years

Despite what our feelings about it may seem to us, this is good, because in the overall sense it is essential to developing humility. Being humble is a choice. It is a choice that is pleasing to God, and one that He wants to reward, and He will do so.

If a new convert is being instructed in the right way and is learning as he should, it is not long before he realizes that he has a real fight on his hands. We should not expect that our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God will be any less subtle than Abraham's, nor any easier than Israel's forty-year-long trek to the Promised Land. However, we are by nature so impatient, and feeding into that is that modern theologians have so emphasized their "free grace and no works" doctrine that they have made Christianity appear as though it is nothing more than a Sunday afternoon stroll in a scenic park filled with delightful experiences. Without a doubt there are delightful experiences. However, the Bible warns us that true Christianity is a fight.

Judging by the huge number of movies and television programs which use war as the venue for the story they are telling, people are very interested in war. Just to give you one example from American history, the American Civil War and the major figures who participated in it is by far and away the most-written about historical event in American history.

That war captures people's imagination. Who can help but be thrilled by the heroic sacrificial epics that unfold on the screen, if only because the stakes may be so high. We like things that depict heroism under very great difficulty, and so we are willing to endure desperate and frightening battles fought against sometimes overwhelming odds that must be overcome even if it is only for the sake of mere survival.

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As moving as some of those things might be, the Christian's warfare is of far greater importance than any war among nations, if only because the stakes may very well be eternal in their consequence. Not only that, but the Christian's warfare is also huge, because ultimately every person who has ever been born will be involved in it. Some for long periods, like Abraham and Moses, and others for shorter periods. Some will face battles with greater intensity, and some with less, but all must war.

This war has hand-to-hand conflicts. There are wounds, and battle fatigue, and discouragement, and sometimes the fatigue and discouragements are great, and this warfare has its sieges and assaults that are peculiar to its nature. It has victories, and it has defeats, and perhaps the most serious of all though is that the consequences are awesome.

When nations make war against each other the results are temporary, and in many cases reparations can be made and things patched up. In the spiritual war of which I speak, there comes a time, as I showed in my "Hebrews" sermon at the Feast ["A Feast Message From Hebrews"], that when the fight is over, the results are unchangeable and eternal. There is no making up, no reparation when that point is reached.

I Timothy 6:12-14 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life whereunto you are also called, and have confessed a good confession before many witnesses. I give you charge in the sight of God, who makes alive all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that you keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this context Paul is calling upon Timothy to persevere, both in his personal life and in his responsibilities as a minister. This persevering is not passive. It is not just a mere holding on, but is a contending one. In other words, while we are persevering, the battle is on, and it is during this contention Paul tells Timothy that he must seize upon his opportunity to have eternal life.

The metaphor appears to be drawn from a wrestling match, because the Christian is called upon to win. This indicates that the Christian is called to hand-to-hand combat. In addition, Paul's charge implied that also underlying the contention are the demands of loyalty to Jesus Christ that are in place because of Timothy's calling. Therefore Timothy, and we also, are to follow the example of Jesus Christ's loyalty to His Father before Pontius Pilate, remembering His Words, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done."

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Christ's loyalty cost Him His life, and His loyalty gave Satan and the world a short-lived victory that quickly ended though with Christ's resurrection. All of these things in this context point to the beginning of Timothy's wrestling match—that is, his warfare—as being when he was baptized and entered into the covenant and literally became the property of Jesus Christ to be used and prepared as Christ sees fit.

Jesus Christ, as our Commanding General, points in the direction that He wants each of us to go, and it is not always exactly the same direction. Everybody fights his own battle. Everybody is involved in his own little war in which the consequences are so great. Anybody who understands the nature of holiness knows that the Christian *must* be a man of war if he is going to succeed in any appreciable extent. The enemy is that evil triumvirate: the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

The world is an obvious nearby distraction from our duties to Christ. The Devil at times certainly encourages us to overly-satisfy ourselves, but the most challenging adversary of all is our ever-present flesh. Jesus warned us of this during His ministry.

Luke 14:26 If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

How much of a problem is there within the family—that is, the relations of the person who is called? Hardly anybody escapes this contention. Sometimes somebody does escape it. Their situation is a little different, but almost everybody who is called has something to answer for to those people who are closest to him physically.

Just a little aside: When Evelyn and I were called, my mother was really upset. Evelyn's family accepted it fairly easily, and they never gave us a moment's problem, but my mother was another thing altogether. She felt, and in a sense rightfully so, that I had abandoned the family, that I had rejected her childrearing, that I had rejected her as my mother. I was not going to be at all the family occasions, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, or New Year's Day, or any place else. She virtually excommunicated me, my wife, and my children from the family because she was hurt. I can understand that. But after that, my children, in one sense, had no relationship with their grandmother from my side. She treated them pretty meanly because she was angry at me, but they got the brunt of it.

Everybody faces situations somewhat like this to some degree, and so the contention is there. It is part of the warfare. How do you recover from something like that where you

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are turning your back on those who gave you life? It seems like a rejection of them and everything that they stand for, when really in your heart of hearts, you still love them. That can be discouraging, and something you bear with you all the time for the remainder of your calling.

In verse 27 is something far more serious and potentially damaging.

Luke 14:27 And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

The major warning here is contained in the phrase "bear his cross." Everyone of us knows that the cross, or the stake, was the instrument of Christ's death, and that in addition to Him being impaled on it so that He shed His life's blood, He was also made to carry it to the place of His execution. But in this verse it says that we, His followers, must be willing to bear *our* cross.

Most commentators interpret this "cross" to mean any difficulty that happens to arise because one is a Christian. This is not wrong, but it is also quite broad. I think that I can make the "cross" in Jesus' illustration more specific and personal, and at the same time show why Christianity is a battle. It is a war.

Matthew 15:16-20 And Jesus said [to His disciples], Are you also yet without understanding? Do not you yet understand that whatsoever enters in at the mouth goes into the belly and is cast out [is eliminated] into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and *they* defile the man. For out of the heart proceeds evil thought, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defiles not a man.

The wages of sin is death, and sin is generated in one's own mind; therefore, our carnal heart is the instrument of our death. This is the cross that we bear. Our heart is the instrument of our death, and we carry that heart, that mind, with us wherever we go. There is no escaping it every second of our life. Once we are called we are under the gun of that heart from which proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, and every other thing that is sin that He just did not mention.

It is like our heart is Pandora's Box that is, at least potentially, pouring out its filth into

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the activities of our life. Thus wherever we go, regardless of the circumstances, we have to be aware of what that instrument of our death is capable of generating. Its evil motivation must be contended with to keep it from breaking out in its enmity against God. It can put our loyalty to Jesus on the line in very quick order, so a measure of guard duty should be an ever-present reality in our life.

True Christianity is a fight, and I say "true," because much of what passes for Christianity today is so passive that it consists of little more than going to church each week.

Can you imagine a soldier fighting a war like that? He is in the war for two hours, and then he leaves, and the other six days and twenty-two hours he is on leave, he is on furlough. He is not in the battle. Oh, no, brethren. It is not like that at all. This is why Jesus says you have to count the cost. Once Jesus enlists you, you are under the gun, as it were, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, because wherever you go you are going to take that cross with you. You are going to take the generator of the warfare right with you wherever you go.

You can be driving down the freeway and somebody cuts you off. What comes to your mind? Anger, and all that it can produce, can happen in a split second. Is your heart always under control? No, it is not, because that heart is still beating away there, and this is why the flesh is *the big* problem. The world? We can get away from it a bit, maybe in the sanctuary of our own home. Satan? We can tell him to "Beat it, bud!" and he is commanded to leave. He may not leave right away, but he is going to leave. But the heart is there 24/7.

All too often, in fact I think in just about every case, nobody, when he is baptized, really takes this into consideration. None of us. We just do not have the depth of understanding at that time to realize what is going on. We are sincere. We really mean it. But God is merciful, because in most cases He introduces us to the warfare rather gently. That is why Paul said twenty years later, "Oh! Wretched man that I am!" When he wrote the book of Romans, boy, he got it! He understood the mercy of God in what God had done to give us Jesus Christ, to give us His Spirit, and to give us this opportunity, and to be as gentle with us as needs to be done in order to get us into His Kingdom.

True Christianity is a fight. We sing the song, "Onward, Christian Soldiers/Marching as to war/With the Word of Jesus/Going on before." Even as a soldier is not called to live a life of comfort and ease and indolence and security; just like Abraham and Sarah, neither are we. Something is always going on in the church. Something is always going

on in this warfare. In another place, Jesus warns us that we are called upon to guard the truth, and to be alert as a soldier on guard duty during warfare so that we know all is well that is going on about us, and also what is going on around us.

II Timothy 2:1-5 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit you to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. You therefore endure hardness [suffering] as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

This adds to the warfare metaphor. It is helpful to understand that the word-pictures within I and II Timothy—things that Paul wrote to Timothy—are aimed directly, first of all most specifically at Timothy, and then secondarily to all of the ministry. But at the same time, all Christians are included within their scope, but with less specific application because they are not in the ministry. But everybody wars, not just the ministry, but usually the ministry's warfare tends to be more intense. "To whom much is given, the much more is required."

Verse 3 says, "You therefore endure suffering as a *good* soldier." The word translated "good" in English is adequate, but the word is really more dignified than that. It should be translated "noble." Paul said that the warfare to which we are called as a soldier is *noble*. That puts it in a pretty high category.

There are three charges that are advanced by Paul in this context.

(1) Like a soldier, a Christian must be strong, understanding that suffering is part of his lot in life.

I would say from my experience that it comes in waves. And again, from my experience, it seems to me like the waves are coming faster than they used to. I think it is because of the times, that God is increasing the intensity of what we must face. But suffering is part of our lot in life, and a Christian soldier *must* set his mind to patiently persevere. It is going to happen. Suffering will occur. But if we carry into the battle the thought that is true to what God is, that He is patient, that He is careful in the intensities He allows to come upon us, or brings upon us Himself, He always supplies us with what we need. (We will get to that one just a little bit later.)

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(2) Like a strong soldier, a Christian is called upon to give wholehearted loyal devotion.

The word "devotion" has an emotional quality to it. A soldier of course can have other interests. God is not denying us having other interests, but the Christian cannot allow himself to become so absorbed in the affairs of civilian life that he is distracted from his service to his Master who enlisted him. We were just told that Christ enlisted us.

The implication of this charge is: How can a Christian soldier be faithful if his life is not properly prioritized? That is the issue. The second imperative is that a soldier not only must endure, he must prioritize the activities of his life. His major aim must always be to the One who enlisted him. Jesus said, "I always do what pleases My Father" (John 8:29). All this is done in an atmosphere that contains a heart tugging against one's loyalty to God.

(3) This is contained in verse 5. In this imperative the metaphor shifts somewhat toward an athletic event. The Christian soldier must perform his service to his Master in accordance with the rules that are laid down for him. More specifically, this means he must express his love in every activity in behalf of his Master. Remember, Jesus, our Master, said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." That is where our loyalty will show. It will show itself in obedience.

Let us look at verses 6 and 7, because the metaphor shifts again. It shifted from warfare to an athletic encounter, and now it shifts to a farmer.

II Timothy 2:6 The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of fruits.

There is a reminder that the Christian soldier is going to be amply rewarded by Christ for his disciplined service. Actually, what we have here is a forced imperative urging the soldier to put his mind to pondering and digesting these things.

II Timothy 2:7 Consider [ponder, think, meditate on] what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

He wants us to digest what he is saying here. Follow the rules, because careful adherence to the first three imperatives will not be fruitless. We are going to be paid, as it were, handsomely for the sacrifices that we undergo in behalf of Jesus Christ.

Verses 8, 9, and 10 continue the exhortation. He said, "Consider what I say," and now

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he says:

II Timothy 2:8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.

This is to give us hope. This is to get us understanding that even if we should lose our life as a soldier of Jesus Christ—lose our life out of obedience to Him—we will be resurrected just like Christ was resurrected after His faithfulness was expressed in His loyalty, going all the way to His death.

Then in the first part of verse 9, Paul turns away from Christ and points to himself.

II Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds;

In other words, in following Christ, Paul had no easy row to hoe.

II Timothy 2:9 But the word of God is not bound.

God followed through in delivering Paul from all of his afflictions.

II Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

This verse actually turns back to, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Paul was saying that the soldier of Jesus Christ is to consider very carefully the quality of the fellowship that he gives to others within the body. It has to be a fellowship of love.

I mentioned earlier that the Christian's major area of conflict is with himself. This is because of the nature that is ingrained within us with its corrupt habits in our character since birth. Romans 8:7 reminds us that "the carnal mind is enmity [in this case, contention in warfare] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

We are given vivid word-pictures of what we must do in our warfare, but let us back off just a little bit and let us see what we have been given by God as a gift as we were being converted.

Mark 14:38 Watch you and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

This verse will become more important as we move on. The Spirit he is talking about there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is ready and willing to fight the battle, but the carnal nature is also ready and willing to battle. The one is *against* God, the other is *for* God. What I am getting at here is what God requires, God enables. Like every nation should do, He has equipped those He has enlisted in this warfare with what they need. He has given us the equipment to work with in order to fight the battle so we can win. The spirit is willing. It is the flesh that is the weaker of the two.

What God has done is a vital step in our winning this warfare. As mentioned in several earlier sermons, during the sanctification process we must cooperate with God in this warfare, and it is in the warfare that our Christian works—what we were created for—come into a clear position.

Galatians 5:16-17 This I say then, Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would.

When he says, "cannot do," he does not mean that it is not impossible to do. He means you cannot allow yourself to do these things.

Galatians 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

It is clear from both verses 16 and 17 that the spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other. Now where there is opposition of this nature we have a struggle on our hands because there is a fierce conflict inside the Christian's heart, especially when the Christian is allowing himself to drift toward the following of the flesh. This produces a guilty conscience.

It is clear that Paul perceived Christian responsibility to Christ as a continuous and unremitting struggle. In one sense, the Christian has already won the victory if he will endure and not yield to the impulses of the flesh, but instead endure and yield to the Spirit, because Christ is in him. Christ will give the victory, but the Christian must choose

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to make the "small by comparison" sacrifices required. In other areas Paul shows the difficulty involved in making these "small by comparison" sacrifices.

In verse 24 Paul uses the term "crucified." That is not the first time Paul used the term "crucified." I will read that verse to you again before we turn to another one. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me.

There is an interesting difference between Romans 6:6 and Galatians 2:20 where the word "crucified" appears, and Galatians 5:24 where it appears again. My source for what I am going to tell you here is *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 11, pages 501 and 502. To me it is interesting what they say.

In Romans 6:6 and Galatians 2:20 Paul used the Greek term that is translated "crucified" in its *passive* voice, and the way that is translated is "was crucified." This indicates something that has been done in his behalf by somebody else. Well, we know Who it was. It was Christ. It was something that happened in the past, but it was done in his behalf by somebody else. However, in Galatians 5:24 he wrote it in the *active* voice, and therefore it is translated "have crucified." What this difference does is it points to what the Christian has done for himself, and must continue to regard as being done.

Remember, Paul too was going through sanctification. Now what was Paul saying? He was saying that crucifying ourselves in the manner he was talking about is a daily operation. There were some things regarding this crucifixion that nobody could do but Christ, and He did them for us. He died, but because He was crucified, we remain alive, but we go through the symbol of baptism to show symbolically—that is, in the spirit we died and were then resurrected, but once we are resurrected he is showing in Galatians 5:24 that we have to crucify ourselves daily.

The "old man" was crucified, but when he came up out of the water he was a new man, but the old nature was still there. That is very interesting. So then, in daily practice, the new man must conduct himself with his new nature, living up to what he claims he is.

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Colossians 3:5-8 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience: In the which you also walked some time when you lived in them. But now you also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

"Crucify" and "mortify" are very strong words. I have already given you some information regarding "crucifying." Now I am going to go into "mortifying." This is really vivid. The Greek word here that is translated "mortify" is *nekrosate*. It is a *very* strong word that means "to make dead." In secular Greek writing it is used in the sense "to slay utterly." Put that into there: "Slay *utterly* therefore your members."

In the Colossians 3:5 context, Paul is calling on us not to merely control or suppress evil acts and attitudes, but to wipe them out completely. It suggests extermination; a "take no prisoners" approach. One commentator by the name of McClaren illustrated *nekrosate* in this way. This is vivid. He said, "It is as if you are operating machinery and your finger has gotten caught between two gears, and if you don't act quickly, you will lose your life. So you hurriedly grab a nearby ax and chop off your hand at the wrist so as not to be pulled further into the machinery." That is pretty vivid.

This is similar to Jesus stating that "if your eye offends you, pluck it out." "If your hand offends you, cut it off." He of course did not mean for that to be taken literally, but both in Paul's case here and in Jesus' case it was a deliberate exaggeration to make a point of the seriousness of sin and the kind of warfare that we as Christian soldiers are involved in.

The "old man" was symbolically crucified and buried in baptism, but what Paul is saying here is that we must make sure that this symbolic death is practical in everyday life. This verse also gives us further insight into why overcoming and growing is so difficult that it is termed "war."

Notice the word "members." "Mortify therefore your members." Notice that Paul describes "members" right within the verse as immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and covetousness. Now "members" obviously is literally a reference to body parts such as hands, eyes, feet, stomach, and sexual organs, but rather than name those parts he names vices; sin. How do bodily parts become sin? Paul does it through a figure of speech called metonymy. Metonymy occurs in grammar when a cause or a source is substituted for the affect that it produces; in other words, the consequences or the

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product that the source yields.

I am going to give you another verse that might help you to understand this. Metonymies appear quite often in the Bible, and if you do not understand them it can really be a puzzle when you are reading them.

Numbers 3:16 And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.

In English that appears like it is easy to understand. There is only one trouble. Moses did not use the word "word" here when he wrote that. That word "word" in Hebrew is literally "mouth." What does "mouth" produce? It produces words. Thus, when the translators came across that, they translated it the way we, reading in English, would understand it a great deal better. But in the Hebrew the body member, the mouth, is substituted for the commands that issue from the mouth.

I will give you an American slang expression that is a metonymy: "I'll have none of your lip!" Is somebody going to beat somebody to death with his lip? No. It means, "I'll have none of your saucy remarks that are so offensive." The remarks are the effect that issues forth from the lips—the member, the source. So thus in Colossians 3:5 Paul should be understood as having said, "Put to death the effects produced by and closely associated with the members of your body, such as immorality, impurity," etc., etc.

Like the word "crucified," this is not the first time Paul used the word "members" in a context like this.

Romans 7:17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Did you catch the fact that sin dwells in our members and that it is at war against the law of our mind? The law of our mind is God's Spirit, and thus in Colossians 3:5-8, Paul has gone a step further than he did in Romans 7 by specifically identifying a number of sins

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the bodily parts are guilty of committing, as directed by the heart. In our warfare we put to death the effects, not the members from which they issue. To me this warfare has very interesting aspects to it.

Colossians 3:1-3 If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead, [crucified] and your life is hid with Christ in God.

If we are following through with what Paul commands in verses 1-3, it ought to be quite comforting actually. Verse 3 ought to be quite comforting, because it affirms the legal fact of the state of our position before God. What does it say there? "For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." That is tremendously comforting if you understand what he is getting at. It is as close as the apostle Paul comes to saying that our salvation is absolutely assured because our life is hid in Christ.

Because we are under Christ's blood, and therefore justified and united with Christ, Paul is affirming our spiritual safety despite the warfare. It is almost, brethren, like we have an invisible shield around us. There is a "however" to this in order that we understand it. However, our safety is a **legal** transaction. That is what justification is. Justification that permits us into God's presence is a legal transaction.

Because Christ has paid the penalty for us, the sins are gone. It is as though they no longer exist. Human nature still exists, but the record of sins is gone. We are under Christ's blood, and we know from places like I John 1, that when we do sin and we go to God in repentance, then the blood of Jesus Christ continues to cleanse us from all sin.

This justification has placed us under obligation to the Father and to the Son, and that obligation is to use the sanctification period to match the legal reality of being forgiven and safe in Christ with the practical need to grow, overcome, and become righteous and holy as Christ was righteous and holy.

It is God's gracious gifts (and I say "gifts" because He gives more than merely His Spirit in our calling), and His Spirit, in combination with the fight to overcome these evil drives, that prepares us for living in the Kingdom of God. Do you hear what I am saying? We are under obligation to the Father and to the Son. The forgiveness puts us under this obligation. They now own us, and we are therefore obliged to fight this war for the purpose, not of salvation, but of **preparing** for the Kingdom of God.

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If we do not cooperate with them in the preparation process, that is when we lose out. Is that understandable? It should be. That is why there are those terms like "mortify" and "crucify," because of the awesomeness of what lies before, combined with the awesomeness of what has been given to us already. Our obligation is not to save ourselves with our works. Our obligation is to get ready for what is coming. We are in training. We are preparing for what is ahead. God has given us the tools to fight the battle.

The kind of righteousness that Jesus Christ had, and God wants us to have, becomes practical in everyday situations through the writing of the law of God on our heart and mind by experience. That ought to be plain, I hope.