

## LICENSED TO KILL

### Chapter One: Killing Sin – The Definition of Mortification

#### INTRO:

- You may cuddle sin like a pet, but that doesn't take the wild out of it or make it less dangerous. Evil cannot be domesticated. Sin is poised to attack your faith at any moment.
- Sin left unchecked always destroys. Sin defiles the human conscience, hijacks human relationships, and weighs down the world with brutality and injustice.
- Our intention towards sin must therefore mirror its hostile intentions towards us: death and destruction.
- Mortification = killing sin

#### WHAT IS MORTIFICATION?

##### I. **Mortification is about indwelling sin, not the physical body**

- a. Christianity is not against the body
  - i. C.S. Lewis – Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body
- b. Our physical bodies are not evil.
  - i. By “the flesh” Paul doesn't mean the physical body, but indwelling sin, the sinful disposition of the fallen human nature.
  - ii. By “deeds of the body” Paul doesn't mean all the deeds of the body but those that are sinful.
- c. Gal. 5:24 “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”
- d. So, “the flesh” is our fallen and sinful disposition towards evil, which has passions that war against the desires of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), and those desires must be killed.
- e. The focus of mortification, then, is not our physical body, but our sinful desires and the sinful deeds they produce.

##### II. **Mortification targets the heart, not just behavior**

- a. Our target is not merely bad behavior but the sinful desires of the heart that produce the behavior. Many people change their behavior without changing their heart to any significant degree. But Jesus is concerned about the root and motivation of sinful behavior.
- b. We should not assume that the lack of certain behaviors means that sin is mortified or the heart is pure. Just because someone is no longer given to certain kinds of sins is no indication that his heart has been changed.
- c. An expression of sin may be pruned away in one area, but because the root is left intact, a different expression may simply grow up in another location.
- d. Mortifying sin is not merely changing behavior, but rather addressing sinful desires in the heart. But how are sinful desires recognized and weakened?
  - i. We have to weaken sin by taking away the things that give it strength.
  - ii. **One of the most practical ways to kill sin is to quit giving it opportunities to thrive**
    1. Make no provision of for the flesh to gratify its desires – Rom. 13:14b

##### III. **Mortification leads to progressive holiness, not sinlessness**

- a. **The goal of mortification is a life of genuine holiness that results from the gradual weakening of sin's influence in our hearts and lives.**
- b. Do not be mistaken: mortification does not produce perfection in this life. The total removal of sin from our hearts will not happen until glorification.
- c. We will contend against indwelling sin all our days in this life (Rom. 7:14-25). This means that life on earth is marked by warfare: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and

exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

- d. This reality should make us vigilant.
  - i. We need to study the strategies of our enemy.
  - ii. We need to know ourselves and our weaknesses.
  - iii. We must always be armed with our spiritual weapons.
- e. Mortification is an umbrella term for a whole range of activities designed to gradually weaken the power of sin in your life.

#### IV. **Mortification is for believers, not unbelievers**

- a. The scriptural commands to put sin to death are always addressed to those who already believe in Jesus. This tells us two things:
  - i. Christians still have to deal with sin.
  - ii. We cannot grow in holiness apart from the power of Christ that is ours through salvation.
- b. None of us can kill sin on our own. Jesus doesn't call us to become holy prior to saving us by his grace, because we can't be holy without his grace.
- c. **The only way to kill sin is through faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit.**
- d. Putting sin to death is the duty of every Christian, but no one can become a Christian through mortification. The only sins we can kill are the sins that have been forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus.
  - i. Owen: There is no death of sin without the death of Christ.
- e. To attempt to kill sin without Christ will only delude us and harden us further in our sins.
- f. **The first priority in dealing with sin is to look to the crucified Savior, Jesus Christ.**
  - i. Before you can kill sin, you have to look to the Lord who was lifted up on the cross for you. You cannot fight sin unless you have found rest in the inexhaustible sufficiency of the doing and dying of Jesus Christ in your place. You cannot mortify sin unless that sin has already been nailed to the cross of Christ.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Do you have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ that is characterized by a desire for holiness and a commitment to keep turning from sin? When did you first believe in Jesus?
- Which has characterized more of your time: modifying your behavior or changing your deepest desires, drives, and motives?
- What has mortifying sin looked like for you in the past?
- Who first taught you how to put sin to death in your life?
- What partners do you have contending with you in this battle?