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"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."
COL.3.1

MORTIFICATION.
(Romans 8.12-15)

An Address (revised)

At Forest Gate, E.7.

7th August, 1921

by

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MORTIFICATION. (Romans 8.12-15).

An Address by Mr.P.W.Heward,

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An unsaved man CANNOT mortify the deeds of the body. He may improve, he may cast aside CERTAIN sins, but he cannot mortify the deeds of the body. Mortifying is in the Spirit, "If ye SPIRITUALLY do mortify the deeds of the body". Here we have definitely brought before us WHAT mortification is, HOW it is done, and that which is the enjoyable result.

We are asked what mortification is - shall we first say what it is not? It is NOT a fleshly putting aside of certain evils. The flesh can be proud of putting away one sin, and thus put another in its place. That is not mortification. Pride sometimes likes to arrange the putting aside of something wrong to boast of self's power to do it. That is not mortification. Furthermore, mortification is NOT a bare physical action. There are those who have, in order to deal with their souls, inflicted physical pain. They have given themselves physical sufferings in order to "mortify" - THAT is not the revealed will of God in this wondrous passage. A Hindu devotee can excel the most ardent and most enthusiastic penance-maker. He is willing to go through more. Willingness for self-torture is no proof of love to Christ. Man-made penance is not mortification. To wear articles of clothing that cause pain, to lie on a bed of spikes - these things the devotee can do "to THE SATISFYING OF THE FLESH", as Col. 2.23 shows. Mortification is far deeper, far deeper. Sin, like leprosy, is deeper than the skin, and mortification must be deeper too. Do not misunderstand me. The REVOLT from a hermit's life has often been the enjoyment of social companionship to the neglect of fellowship with the Lord. The REVOLT from the giving up of some, in days gone by, amid their penance and inflicting of physical pain, has often been the indulgence of the body. There is no glory to God in the revolt from one sin to another. The common danger to-day is not that we shall torture our bodies, but that we shall indulge them. The danger to-day is not that we shall lie on a bed of spikes, but that we shall lie on a bed of ease. The danger is not that we shall fast until we can accomplish nothing, but that we shall feed ourselves with earthly food rather than with spiritual food- THAT is the peril. But IF we think that the reverse of this action is NECESSARILY spiritual, it is not so. Mortification is not a penance for the body, but a mortifying of the DEEDS of the body, and this means far more. "Mortify your members that are upon the earth" - not cut your hands as the priests of Baal cut themselves, but mortify your members, your desires. The mortification of a desire cuts deeper than the mortification of the physical body. Mortification is not a PHYSICAL act, but a spiritual. Furthermore, mortification is NOT a jerk of emotionalism; the word "for" which begins the next verse, shows this - "FOR as many as are LED by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God". Mortification is not a jerking, but a being led. It is not a mere experience of a moment, but a continuance in the power of God. Thus we see something of what it is not, and incidentally learn, in humility, what it is

But let us look yet more closely at the positive aspect. Mortification is a contrast with living according to the flesh. The first part of the verse shows this-

it is therefore a putting to death the deeds of the body. Far from claiming sinlessness, mortification involves a DEEP SENSE OF PERSONAL SIN. Observe, beloved friends, crucifixion is not death. Crucifixion is once, as a stepping stone to CONTINUED mortification, and mortification is of the DEEDS of the body. You cannot mortify a thing which does not exist. Romans 8, therefore, asserts quite as strongly as Romans 7, that the deeds of the body EXIST. Romans 8 asserts quite as definitely as Romans 7, not only that there is the flesh within to be mortified, but the expressions of the flesh exist as deadly living facts to be mortified. In Romans 7 they are called chains that bring into captivity; in Romans 8 they are called deeds, even though they are NIPPED IN THE VERY BUD, and thus they should be dealt with. God calls things by their true name. The nipping in the very bud is marked definitely before us. There MUST be the mortifying of the deeds of the body. It is so important that there should be a holy definiteness as to these deeds of the body, that God may be glorified in victory over them. "If through the Spirit ye mortify the DEEDS of the body". Mortification is a recognition that the "tiniest" sins are sins, and MUST be mortified, that their living power may not go any further. Mortification, therefore, is a keen sense of the BEGINNINGS of sin and a holy hatred of them. Hence, mortification is painful, for it deals with the "just begun" actions on which the natural wish is set, and it cuts to the very root of them. Mortification is a being LED by the Spirit of God to take GOD'S standpoint, and as the still further verse shows by the added word "for", mortification is the manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God in connection with deliverance from bondage. "We have not received the spirit of BONDAGE again to fear". This verse has more than one aspect, but we can rightly say that mortification speaks of a deliberate and definite view of all sin as a slavery, and mortification views God's dear people as determined they WILL NOT be in that slavery, but that they will mortify that which would have a gripping power over their lives. Mortification therefore, is viewed as a FREEDOM and an ENJOYMENT of the Spirit of sonship. Nevertheless, mortification is a painful process, and this is implied by the words linked on to the word "for". "FOR..... we have received the spirit of sonship in whom we CRY, Abba, Father". The stress on mortification causes a believer to CRY. There should be a real groaning. The joy of faith is real; but victory involves a conflict.

How is mortification being accomplished? This also is partly implied, "For if ye, THROUGH THE SPIRIT" (we may spell with a capital "S" and with a small "s", for there are two thoughts) - "If ye through the Spirit (and because of the new nature) are mortifying the deeds of the body, ye shall live". Hence we see that mortification must be SPIRITUALLY. We cannot gain a real victory over sin, EXCEPT in the power of the Spirit of God, We can give up actions, but THAT is not mortification. We can put them aside, but THAT is not mortification. Mortification is not a refusal to do, but a killing refusal to do, which is vastly different. Many an action can be put aside by strong will.

THAT is the power of part of the will over the natural wishes and feelings and tendencies of another part of the life, but mortification is a victory in which there is a continuous slaying, or a doing to death, of the deeds of the body. Ah, beloved friends, it is as to THIS that we so often fail, Mortification must be a spiritual strain, a spiritual victory, a spiritual conflict, that with a sense of our dependence on the Holy Spirit, and in the exercise of the new nature which God has given us, we may determine to be free from the bondage of self-will. The only true freedom is pleasing God.

The result of mortification is remarkably put before us, or shall I rather put it, the promise to mortification? I will not say the "result", because grace often grants more than the promise, but mortification is a stepping stone to the joy of "life" in every sense of the word. If ye walk after the flesh ye are on the verge of death. Grace may prevent, but sin has this goal! "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live". Because He lives we shall live also, but the true enjoyment of life

is as we mortify, and we have the assurance of eternal life AS we mortify. "Ye shall live" - here is the encouragement to the people of God, and then the words go on to explain the TRUE aspect of life - "For as many as are LED by the Spirit of God, they are the SONS of God". A child of God may know comparatively little of victory. When one enjoys the word "son" and understands the meaning of the expression "sons of God" there must be the LEADING of the Spirit of God in order that there may be victory to the praise of the glory of God's grace. Oh, that we may not only perceive what should be, but also know the fuller realization of the Lord's mighty work in our experience!

(Booklet on "Crucifixion and Mortification" and on Romans 7etc. gladly sent to exercised believers).