

When we think of self-control, we think of keeping a grip on our temper, our fear, or our emotions.

But what about control of self? The world around us cries out for exactly that: boldly determine your own direction, chase your own dreams, control your own self destiny. I want to challenge you to stop controlling your self; your plans, your destiny. There is a better way to live, and a more fruitful way to spend your life.

The Gift of the Spirit

The key to Romans 8, the key to this new life in Christ, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. If you are a true believer, the Word of God says you have the Spirit of God living in you. Romans 8:9 puts it plainly, “...*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*”

The evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit; our bodies become the temple of God's presence (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Do you know and experience that presence daily?

Sometimes we get so used to the light that we forget what it was like to walk in the dark. The Spirit awakens even our thinking, giving us wisdom and clarity in an age of brain fog, where our phones and feeds are tools the enemy uses to dull our senses.

Three things the Spirit does for us:

1. **He gives us victory over the flesh** — not just the power to resist temptation, but a distinctly better path to walk.
2. **He is a seal of belonging to God** — Jesus purchased us by his blood (see Revelation 5:9), and the Spirit's presence means we've been adopted into God's family.
3. **He gives new life** — not revised life, but new life. A creative miracle where there was no life before.

Do you know this life? This isn't an optional extra. This is the definition of being a Christian.

So Then

Romans 8:12 opens with “*so then*” — in light of everything just written. Paul writes that we're debtors to live according to the Spirit, not the flesh. We have no obligation to the old way of life; it has no claim on us. That's the freedom we have in Christ.

If the Spirit has given us life, we cannot live according to the flesh, which only leads to death. How could we possess life and still chase what kills us? We're indebted to the Spirit of life, so we put to death anything that threatens it.

Verse 13 says it directly: *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

Two Plots of Land

Picture two plots side by side.

The first is neglected. Nobody plants or waters weeds, yet within weeks, thorns and thistles take over. Why? That's what uncultivated soil naturally produces, at zero effort. That's the flesh: sin and division spring up naturally in the human heart when it's left alone.

The second plot is a managed greenhouse. To grow the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23), you need deliberate cultivation, watering, pruning, (a kind of death), and light from an outside source, God's light.

Healthy, fruitful Christian lives require a cutting off. The old KJV language calls it mortification.

How Do We Put Things to Death?

1. Understand what mortification actually means. It's not masochism, not taking pleasure in hurting ourselves. It's seeing clearly the results of living in sin and the pain it causes us and everyone around us. No matter what sin you're wrestling with, it always affects the people near you. That's a spiritual law.

Jesus said it plainly in Mark 8:34: to take up your cross meant one thing in the Roman world, it was a one-way ticket to execution. He wasn't exaggerating. The only way to follow him is through self-denial, putting to death any use of our mind, eyes, tongue, hands, or feet that serves our own desires instead of God's will.

2. It takes action. Pruning a tree or pulling weeds takes work. So does putting the flesh to death. While the Spirit does the work in us, we still have a part to play, this is especially clear with addiction, but it's true of every sin.

Someone caught in addiction might say, "I prayed, and God didn't take the desire away." But

freedom from addiction is a miracle that still requires hard work on our side.

Only the Spirit gives us the desire and discipline to reject evil; but we have to take action. Don't entertain sinful thoughts; they lead to sinful actions (see Romans 13:14). And it's more than avoidance; we're called to change how we think (see Philippians 4:8).

If your mind is a garden, you'll never find beautiful flowers growing in pornography, social media, or the news feed. Beautiful thoughts come from enjoying God's creation, reading his Word, and having life giving conversations that build people up.

3. Know your why. This life of putting things to death is hard. It runs against our natural pull toward ease and self-indulgence. In a wealthy culture, we can get by on very little effort.

So why do it? The end of verse 13 gives the answer in one Greek word, translated into three English ones: “*you will live.*” The word is *zēsesthe*, from *zoē*, which is the supernatural, God-empowered life.

Jesus came to give us life, not just a pulse and breath, but life that's vibrant and supernatural, life that overflows to the people around us. We can't contain it (see John 10:10).

That rich, satisfying, abundant life is yours and mine as we live by the Spirit and put the flesh to death.

Life through death. Are you fully alive?

What the world calls life is selfish, and it causes us, and those around us, pain. What the Spirit offers is authentic, vibrant life.

Do you know this life?