

Romans 8:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Analysis

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die (ei kata sarka zēte, mellete apothnēskein)—The present tense "live" (zēte) indicates habitual pattern, not occasional failure. The future "shall die" (mellete apothnēskein) points to eternal death, the second death (Revelation 20:14). Paul warns professing believers: flesh-dominated life proves unregenerate state. This isn't losing salvation but revealing its absence.

But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (ei de pneumatī tas praxeis tou sōmatos thanatoute, zēsesthe)—Thanatōō means "put to death, mortify"—ongoing warfare, not one-time victory. Note the agency: pneumatī ("by the Spirit")—sanctification is Spirit-empowered, not self-achieved. "Deeds of the body" (praxeis tou sōmatos) are sinful actions flowing from unredeemed nature. Mortification is daily (Luke 9:23), lifelong (Philippians 3:12-14), and Spirit-dependent. Zēsesthe ("you shall live") is future eternal life and present abundant life (John 10:10).

Historical Context

This verse became central in Puritan theology of mortification (John Owen's classic *The Mortification of Sin*). Owen emphasized that only the Spirit can mortify sin; self-effort produces either despair or self-righteousness. The medieval Catholic practice of physical mortification (flagellation, extreme fasting) misunderstood Paul—the issue is putting sin to death, not punishing the body.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What specific "deeds of the body" is the Spirit currently calling you to mortify?
2. How does Spirit-empowered mortification differ from willpower-based behavior modification?
3. How do you balance the warning of verse 13a with the assurance of verses 1 and 31-39?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	γὰρ	κατὰ	σάρκα	ζήσεσθε	μέλλετε	ἀποθνήσκειν·	εἰ
if	For	after	the flesh	ye live	ye shall	die	if
G1487	G1063	G2596	G4561	G2198	G3195	G599	G1487

δὲ	πνεύματι	τὰς	πράξεις	τοῦ	σώματος	θανατοῦτε
but	through the Spirit	G3588	the deeds	G3588	of the body	do mortify
G1161	G4151		G4234		G4983	G2289

ζήσεσθε

ye live
G2198

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 6:8 (Spirit): For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

1 Peter 2:11 (Parallel theme): Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

1 Corinthians 9:27 (Parallel theme): But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Titus 2:12 (Parallel theme): Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

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

Ephesians 4:22 (Parallel theme): That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

1 Peter 1:22 (Spirit): Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Romans 7:5 (Parallel theme): For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

Ephesians 5:18 (Spirit): And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Romans 6:21 (Parallel theme): What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.