

# Mortification Of Sin: By John Owen

## CHAPTER 2

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

### Definitions

- **attempering**- **To soften, mollify, or moderate; to soothe; to temper; as, ‘to attemper rigid justice with clemency.’**
- **propensity** - **n 1: an inclination to do something; "he felt leanings toward frivolity" [syn: leaning, propensity, tendency] 2: a natural inclination; "he has a proclivity for exaggeration" [syn: proclivity, propensity, leaning] 3: a disposition to behave in a certain way; "the aptness of iron to rust"; "the propensity of disease to spread" [syn: aptness, propensity]**
- **quickened** - **The state of having been made alive; having been vivified; having been revived from death or an inanimate state; hence, to excite; to, stimulate; to incite. In context Owen refers to spiritual death and renewed spiritual life in Christ. cf. Eph. 2:5 and Col. 2:13**
- **professors** - **not top level teachers, but those who profess faith in Christ, profess to be Christians.**
- **contrivances** - **the plans and methods, devices or controls we have put in place to deal with sin.**
- **issues** - **results**
- **lasciviousness** - **in context here, an opportunity, or excuse for uncleanness, immorality and such.**

Owen begins this chapter with the principle he has previously stated;

‘The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.’

He continues to prove that this principle is accurate by directing us to another text where this duty is set down as the normal way in which believers to live - Colossians 3:5 above. He then challenges us to assess ourselves in light of this;

‘Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you. Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work.’

He draws an example from Paul (1 Cor 9:27) and suggests to us that if such a one as he 'incomparably exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, consolations, above the ordinary measure of believers' needed to engage in such discipline, so must we! **Why? What is it about us, even as true believers no longer under condemnation, what is it about the power of sin that remains in us, that necessitates we engage our whole life in the duty of mortification? That is the subject of this second chapter.**

Owen provides us with 6 reasons.

## **1. THE PERMANENCY OF INDWELLING SIN, IT ALWAYS ABIDES IN US WHILE WE ARE IN THIS WORLD**

Owen here just states a very obvious truth, if we even as converted Christians still have sin dwelling in us, that in itself makes this discipline of mortification necessary. He writes at some length about the foolishness and danger of assuming perfection in this life. He summarises,

'Now, it being our duty to mortify, to be killing of sin whilst it is in us [and it always is in some degree], we must be at that work. He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, doth but half his work.'

## **2. NOT ONLY DOES SIN ALWAYS DWELL IN US, IT IS ALWAYS ACTIVE IN US TO LABOURING TO BRING FORTH THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH**

Owen builds on the first point, as it were, if it was just sin dwelling in us that was the only problem, perhaps mortification would not be so important. Perhaps a good analogy is to think of indwelling sin in terms of a tumour. We hear of 'malignant' tumours and 'benign' tumours, the malignant ones are very active, very dangerous, and must be dealt with, benign ones less so. Well Owen would have us think about indwelling sin as malignant, dangerous, active, progressive, and even aggressive. Indwelling sin is not dormant like a left over World War 2 mine, but active like a modern day Scud missile!

'When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions even when there is least suspicion.....If, then, sin be always acting, if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures.'

An excellent and challenging quote to burn into your heart. 'THERE IS NOT A DAY BUT SIN FOILS OR IS FOILED, PREVAILS OR IS PREVAILED ON; AND IT WILL BE SO WHILST WE LIVE IN THIS WORLD'

**3. NOT ONLY DOES SIN ALWAYS DWELL IN US, NOR DOES IT MERELY LABOUR IN US, LEFT TO ITSELF IT WILL BRING FORTH GREAT, CURSED, SCANDALOUS, SOUL-DESTROYING SINS.**

Again Owen builds, mortification is necessary, not just because indwelling sin is; present, nor just because it is always active, but also because left unchecked it will produce serious soul-destroying sin.

‘Sin aims at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head.’

**4. THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS WE ARE GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND A NEW NATURE**

‘Not to be daily employing the Spirit and the new nature for the mortifying of sin is to neglect the excellent succour [help] which God has given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise and trade with. Not to be daily mortifying sin, is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace and love of God, who hath furnished us with a principle of doing it.’

**5. NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY OF MORTIFICATION RESULTS IN MISERY AND WEARINESS, JOYLESSNESS ETC.**

‘This is that which I intend: by the omission of this duty grace withers, lust flourisheth, and the frame of heart grows worse and worse; and the Lord knows what desperate and fearful issues it hath had with many.....See we not those , whom we knew humble, melting, broken-hearted Christians, tender and fearful to offend, zealous for God and all his ways, his Sabbaths and ordinances, grown, through a neglect of watching unto this duty, earthly, carnal, cold, wrathful complying with the men of the world and the things of the world, to the scandal of religion and the fearful temptation of them that know them?’

**6. OTHER CHRISTIAN DUTIES SUCH AS GROWING IN GRACE MAKE MORTIFICATION AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

‘Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who doth not kill sin in his way takes no steps towards the journey’s end. He who finds not opposition from it, and who sets not himself in every particular to its mortification, is at peace with it, not dying to it.

**Owen concludes the chapter by describing two categories of evil that attend unto every unmortified person, that is two lamentable things that happen when professors neglect this duty, first, in relation to themselves, and then secondly, in relation to others.**

### **1. IN RELATION TO THEMSELVES**

- a. ‘he will have slight thoughts of sin, it will not be a bitter, grieving thing to him, he will grow comfortable with it.’

‘When a man hath confirmed his imagination to such an apprehension of grace and mercy as to be able, without bitterness, to swallow and digest daily sins, that man is at the very brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Neither is there a greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world that to drive such a trade.’

### **2. IN RELATION TO OTHERS**

- a. when others see a professing Christian failing to mortify sin, and therefore not producing holiness it hardens them in their own sin, it produces in them the idea that they are in as good a position as the best professors.
- b. the unmortified professor deceives such people in making them believe that if they can come up to their standard it will be well with them.

### **QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION**

- Give a one sentence summary of why mortification is so essential (Owen gives a couple!)
- What are the dangers of assuming perfection and of no longer needing to mortify sin?
- How does Paul describe sin’s activity in the Christian in Romans 7?
- What is the goal of our sinful nature/indwelling sin?
- How does our new nature operate in relation to sin, and how is failure to mortify sin, sin in itself?
- What are the results of living a life without much by way of mortification?
- What is the evidence of a life without much way of mortification?