

Mortification Of Sin: By John Owen

CHAPTER 10

‘Getting a clear sense of the Guilt, Dangers and Evil of Sin’

Objection: A hardening of the heart; hardness of heart.

This is a very excellent (though very convicting and challenging chapter. Owen has one overall purpose which may be described as ‘alerting us to the sinfulness of sin’.

‘The second direction is this: Get a clear and abiding sense upon thy mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of that sin wherewith thou are perplexed:--’

This he does under three points as suggested by his direction.

He alerts us to the very real **guilt** of sin in the believer.

He alerts us to the very real **dangers** of sin in the believer (or one who thinks themselves to be one).

He alerts us to the **evil** of sin in the believer. We shall consider each of these points in turn.

1. If you would mortify any disquieting sin or lust, get yourself a clear sense of the guilt of sin

Innumerable ways there are whereby sin diverts the mind from a right and due apprehension of its guilt. Its noisome exhalations darken the mind, that it cannot make a right judgment of things. Perplexing reasonings, extenuating promises, tumultuating desires, treacherous purposes of relinquishment, hopes of mercy, all have their share in disturbing the mind in its consideration of the guilt of a prevailing lust.

(1) Note well, though the power of sin be weakened by the inherent grace in the believer, so that sin shall not have dominion in them, yet the guilt of sin that still does abide in us and is indeed aggravated and heightened by it.

Rom 6:1,2, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" -- "How shall we, that are dead" The emphasis is on the word "we." How shall we do it, who, as he afterwards describes it, have received grace from Christ to the contrary? We, doubtless, are more evil than any, if we do it. I shall not insist on the special aggravations of the sins of such persons, -- how they sin against more love, mercy, grace, assistance, relief, means, and deliverances than others. But let this consideration abide in thy mind, --

there is inconceivably more evil and guilt in the evil of thy heart that doth remain, than there would be in so much sin if thou hadst no grace at all.

(2) Though God see beauty and excellence in the believer, even when mixed with sin, so also God sees a great deal of the evil working of the lust of their hearts, and indeed more than in notoriously wicked people.

That as God sees abundance of beauty and excellency in the desires of the heart of his servants, more than in any the most glorious works of other men, yea, more than in most of their own outward performances, which have a greater mixture of sin than the desires and pantings of grace in the heart have; so God sees a great deal of evil in the working of lust in their hearts, yea, and more than in the open, notorious acts of wicked men, or in many outward sins whereinto the saints may fall, seeing against them there is more opposition made, and more humiliation generally follows them. Thus Christ, dealing with his decaying children, goes to the root with them, lays aside their profession: Rev. 3:15, "I know thee;" -- "Thou art quite another thing than thou professest; and this makes thee abominable."

2. If you would mortify any disquieting sin or lust, get yourself a clear sense of the dangers which attend or may attend unto it.

(1) Danger 1: of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

The hardening here mentioned is to the utmost, -- utter obduration; sin tends to it, and every distemper and lust will make at least some progress towards it. Thou that was tender, and didst use to melt under the word, under afflictions, wilt grow a some have profanely spoken, "sermon-proof and sickness-proof." Thou that didst tremble at the presence of God, thoughts of death, and appearance before him, when thou hadst more assurance of his love than now thou hast, shalt not be at all concerned, but shalt be able to pass over duties, praying, hearing, reading, and thy heart not in the least affected. Sin will grow a light thing to thee; thou wilt pass it by as a thing of nought; this it will grow to. And what will be the end of such a condition? Can a sadder thing befall thee? Is it not enough to make any heart to tremble, to think of being brought into that estate wherein he should have slight thoughts of sin? Slight thoughts of grace, of mercy, of the blood of Christ, of the law, heaven, and hell, come all in at the same season.

(2) Danger 2: of suffering under some temporal correction by the Lord

Is it nothing to thee that God should kill thy child in anger, ruin thy estate in anger, break thy bones in anger, suffer thee to be a scandal and a reproach in anger, kill thee, destroy thee, make thee lie down in darkness, in anger? Is it nothing that he should punish, ruin, and undo others for thy sake? Let me not be mistaken. I do not mean that God doth send all these things always on his in anger; God forbid! but this

I say, that when he doth so deal with thee, and thy conscience bears witness with him what thy provocations have been, thou wilt find his dealings full of bitterness to thy soul. If thou fearest not these things, I fear thou art under hardness.

(3) Danger 3: of the loss of peace and strength

If ever, then, thou hast enjoyed peace with God, if ever his terrors have made thee afraid, if ever thou hast had strength to walk with him, or ever hast mourned in thy prayer, and been troubled because of thy weakness, think of this danger that hangs over thy head. It is perhaps but a little while and thou shalt see the face of God in peace no more. Perhaps by to-morrow thou shalt not be able to pray, read, hear, or perform any duties with the least cheerfulness, life, or vigour; and thou mayst carry about thee broken bones, full of pain and terror, all the days of thy life. Yea, perhaps God will shoot his arrows at thee, and fill thee with anguish and disquietness, with fears and perplexities; make thee a terror and an astonishment to thyself and others; show thee hell and wrath every moment; frighten and scare thee with sad apprehensions of his hatred; so that thy soul shall run in the night season, and thy soul shall refuse comfort; so that thou shalt wish death rather than life, yea, thy soul may choose strangling.

(4) Danger 4: of eternal destruction

[1.] Note the connection between continuing in sin and eternal destruction

That there is such a connection between a continuance in sin and eternal destruction, that though God does resolve to deliver some from a continuance in sin that they may not be destroyed, yet he will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin; so that whilst any one lies under an abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God are to be held out to him. So Heb. 3:12; to which add chap. 10:38. This is the rule of God's proceeding: If any man "depart" from him, "draw back" through unbelief, "God's soul hath no pleasure in him;" -- "that is, his indignation shall pursue him to destruction: so evidently, Gal. 6:8.

[2.] Note a man that entangled with a sin who has no clear sense of his interest eternal life and he is afraid of the terror of the Lord's judgement, ought to consider that this will be his end (unless he flees from his course of life.

That he who is so entangled, as above described, under the power of any corruption, can have at that present no clear prevailing evidence of his interest in the covenant, by

the efficacy whereof he may be delivered from fear of destruction; so that destruction from the Lord may justly be a terror to him; and he may, he ought to look upon it, as that which will be the end of his course and ways.

3. If you would mortify any disquieting sin or lust, get yourself a clear sense of the evil of it.

(1) Evil 1: it grieves the Holy and blessed Spirit

As a tender and loving friend is grieved at the unkindness of his friend, of whom he hath well deserved, so is it with this tender and loving Spirit, who hath chosen our hearts for a habitation to dwell in, and there to do for us all that our souls desire. He is grieved by our harbouring his enemies, and those whom he is to destroy, in our hearts with him.

(2) Evil 2: by it the Lord Jesus Christ is wounded afresh.

The Lord Jesus Christ is wounded afresh by it; his new creature in the heart is wounded; his love is foiled; his adversary gratified. As a total relinquishment of him, by the deceitfulness of sin, is the "crucifying him afresh, and the putting of him to open shame;" so every harbouring of sin that he came to destroy wounds and grieves him

(3) Evil 3: it will take away our usefulness

All graces, all the ways and means whereby any graces may be exercised and improved, are prejudiced by this means; and as to any success, God blasts such men's undertakings.

Questions for thought and discussion.

- Explain how a Christian deals with sin when they don't feel accurately the guilt of it.
- As believers how should we in fact feel guilt over sin more acutely than others?
- What are the consequences of remaining in sin, or the risks we are playing with if we continue in sin?
- Owen says that there is a connection between continuing in sin and eternal destruction, and that God will not deliver anyone from destruction that continue in sin. How does this fit with the the doctrines of assurance of salvation and the perseverance of the saints?
- What will the evils that attend to a believer continuing in sin (not just dangers) but actual results?