

Mortification Of Sin: By John Owen

CHAPTER 13

'Direction 9: Precautions against false peace'

The Christian who is indulging in sin, and has not mortified it, ought not to have any peace with that sin, that is they ought not to be content to engage in it. However because of the deceitfulness of sin, we can make peace with it. God would not have us make peace with it, he would trouble us, and disquiet our souls so that we mortify it. Owen in this chapter warns us about this possibility, and how we must avoid it. We must make peace with no sin, unless God gives us peace through the mortifying of the sin.

NINTHLY, In case God disquiet the heart about the guilt of its distempers, either in respect of its root and indwelling, or in respect of any eruptions of it, take heed thou speakest not peace to thyself before God speaks it; but hearken what he says to thy soul. This is our next direction, without the observation whereof the heart will be exceedingly exposed to the deceitfulness of sin.

Firstly Owen asserts we ought not to have peace at all unless the Lord gives it to us, in other words the only true peace is God-given, not self-generated through false ideas about God or his ways, or through ignoring the evil or guilt of our sins (see previous chapters), but rather through the ministry of Christ, so the first two points;

1. That as it is the great *prerogative and sovereignty* of God to give grace to whom he pleases ("He hath mercy on whom he will," Rom. 9:18; and among all the sons of men, he calls whom he will, and sanctifies whom he will), so among those so called and justified, and whom he will save, he yet reserves this privilege to himself, to speak peace to whom he pleaseth, and in what degree he pleaseth, even amongst them on whom he hath bestowed grace.

2. As God *creates it for whom he pleaseth*, so it is the prerogative of Christ to speak it home to the conscience.

Now Owen sees we need instruction here, how will we know whether or not the peace we have is God-given or self-generated (and deceitful)?

RULE 1. Men certainly speak peace to themselves when their so doing is *not attended with the greatest detestation imaginable of that sin in reference whereunto they do speak peace to themselves, and abhorrency of themselves for it.* When men are wounded by sin, disquieted and perplexed, and knowing that there is no remedy for them but only in the mercies of God, through the blood of Christ, do therefore look to him, and to the promises of the covenant in him, and thereupon quiet their hearts that it shall be well with them, and that God will be exalted, that he may be gracious to them, **and, yet their**

souls are not wrought to the greatest detestation of the sin or sins upon the account whereof they are disquieted, -- this is to heal themselves, and not to be healed of God.

RULE 2. When men measure out peace to themselves upon the conclusions that their convictions and rational principles will carry them out unto, this is a false peace, and will not abide.

I shall a little explain what I mean hereby. A man hath got a wound by sin; he hath a conviction of some sin upon his conscience; he hath not walked uprightly as becometh the gospel; all is not well and right between God and his soul. He considers now what is to be done. Light he hath, and knows what path he must take, and how his soul hath been formerly healed. Considering that the promises of God are the outward means of application for the healing of his sores and quieting of the heart, he goes to them, searches them out, finds out some one or more of them whose literal expressions are directly suited to his condition. Says he to himself, "God speaks in this promise; here I will take myself a plaster as long and broad as my wound;" and so brings the word of the promise to his condition, and sets him down in peace. This is another appearance upon the mount; the Lord is near, but the Lord is not in it. It hath not been the work of the Spirit, who alone can "convince us of sin, and righteousness, and judgement," **but the mere actings of the intelligent, rational soul.** *Owen means that mortification and the peace that it brings is not merely an act of the will, whereby we think about things and logically merely carry out the suggested steps to mortify it. He elaborates on what he means by way of Q&A's*

Question: It may be said, then, "Seeing that this seems to be the path that the Holy Spirit leads us in for the healing of our wounds and quieting of our hearts, how shall we know when we go alone ourselves, and when the Spirit also doth accompany us?"

Ans. (1.) If any of you are out of the way upon this account, God will speedily let you know it; for besides that you have his promise, that the "meek he will guide in judgement and teach them his way," Ps. 25:9, he will not let you always err. He will, I say, not suffer your nakedness to be covered with fig-leaves, but take them away and all the peace you have in them, and will not suffer you to settle on such lees. You shall quickly know your wound is not healed; that is, you shall speedily know whether or no it be thus with you by the event. The peace you thus get and obtain will not abide.

Ans. (2.) This course is commonly taken without *waiting*; which is the grace, and that peculiar acting of faith which God calls for, to be exercised in such a condition. I know God doth sometimes come in upon the soul instantly, in a moment, as it were, wounding and healing it,..... God will have his children lie a while at his door when they have run from his house, and not instantly rush in upon him; unless he take them by the hand and pluck them in, when they are so ashamed that they dare not come to him. Now, self-healers, or men that speak peace to themselves, do commonly make haste; they will not tarry; they do not hearken what God speaks, but on they will go to be healed.

Ans. (3.) Such a course, thought it may quiet the conscience and the mind, the rational concluding part of the soul, yet it doth not *sweeten* the heart with rest and gracious contentation.

Ans. (4.) Which is worst of all, it amends not the life, it heals not the evil, it cures not the distemper. When God speaks peace, it guides and keeps the soul that it "turn not again to folly." When we speak it ourselves, the heart is not taken off the evil; nay, it is the readiest course in the world to bring a soul into a trade of backsliding.

RULE 3. We speak peace to ourselves when we do it slightly. This the prophet complains of in some teachers: Jer. 6:14, "They have healed the wound of the daughter of my people slightly." And it is so with some persons: they make the healing of their wounds a slight work; a look, a glance of faith to the promises does it, and so the matter is ended.

RULE. 4. Whoever speaks peace to himself upon any one account, and at the same time hath another evil of no less importance lying upon his spirit, about which he hath had no dealing with God, that man cries "Peace" when there is none.....Then shall it be well with men, when they have an equal respect to all God's commandments. God will justify us *from* our sins, but he will not justify the least sin *in* us: "He is a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."

RULE 5. When men of themselves speak peace to their consciences, it is seldom that God speaks humiliation to their souls. God's peace is humbling peace, melting peace, as it was in the case of David; never such deep humiliation as when Nathan brought him the tidings of his pardon. *This is a bit of classic Owen; he complicates things a bit in the way he writes it! What he means is that when we speak peace to ourselves, we often do so either with a certain pride, or more likely, with very little, or a very limited or temporary humility. Not so when God speaks peace to our souls over sin - he humbles us, often deeply.*

Owen then concludes with 2 more questions,
But you will say, "When may we take the comfort of a promise as our own, in relation to some peculiar wound, for the quieting the heart?"

Firstly Owen says when God speaks the comfort and peace then we may take the comfort - this is the obvious application of all that he has written in this chapter.

But you will say, "We are where we were. When God speaks it, we must receive it, that is true; but how shall we know when he speaks?"

(1.) I would we could all practically come up to this, to receive peace when we are convinced that God speaks it, and that it is our duty to receive it. But, --

(2.) There is, if I may so say, a secret instinct in faith, whereby it knows the voice of Christ when he speaks indeed; as the babe leaped in the womb when the blessed Virgin came to

Elisabeth, faith leaps in the heart when Christ indeed draws nigh to it. "My sheep," says Christ, "know my voice," John 10:4; -- "They know my voice; they are used to the sound of it;" and they know when his lips are opened to them and are full of grace.

If you exercise yourselves to acquaintance and communion with him, you will easily discern between his voice and the voice of a stranger. When he doth speak, he speaks as never man spake; he speaks with power, and one way or other will make your "hearts burn within you," as he did to the disciples, Luke 24. He doth it by "putting in his hand at the hole of the door," Cant. 5:4, -- his Spirit into your hearts to seize on you.

He that hath his senses exercised to discern good or evil, being increased in judgement and experience by a constant observation of the ways of Christ's intercourse, the manner of the operations of the Spirit, and the effects it usually produceth, is the best judge for himself in this case.

Secondly, If the word of the Lord doth good to your souls, he speaks it; if it humble, if it cleanse, and be useful to those ends for which promises are given, -- namely, to endear, to cleanse, to melt and bind to obedience, to self-emptiness, etc. But this is not my business; nor shall I farther divert in the pursuit of this direction. Without the observation of it, sin will have great advantages towards the hardening of the heart.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Why is it that God withhold peace from us sometimes, even as we take up his promises and so forth?
- Why it is both great error and very dangerous to try and secure peace outside of the ways and means God has provided for us to gain peace?
- Come prepared to summarise in your own words Owens 5 rules for identifying whether our peace is a genuine God-given peace or not.
- What ought we to especially look for in ourselves as a result of God speaking peace to us?