

Mortification Of Sin: By John Owen

CHAPTER 14

‘Direction 10: The great direction — Act faith on Christ’

probatum est - a proof, so Owen says, there are many proofs of the point he is making.

‘Now, the considerations which I have hitherto insisted on are rather of things *preparatory* to the work aimed at then such as will *effect* it. It is the heart's due preparation for the work itself, without which it will not be accomplished, that hitherto I have aimed at.’

So Owen begins his final chapter, and it should be obvious that this is the case. Remember our primary text, ‘Romans 8:13 13 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. ‘, it should be obvious. While we are to take action against sin, the efficient cause is Christ through his Spirit! So his ultimate direction to us as we pursue the mortification of sin is,

1. Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.

Later on he asserts the place and importance of the Spirit,

2. I have only, then, to add the heads of the work of the Spirit in this business of mortification, which is so peculiarly ascribed to him. In one word: This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is effected, carried on, and accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all the parts and degrees of it; as, -

Now the most obvious question we will ask in relation to this final directive is How? How do we act faith upon Christ unto the mortification of sin?

(1.) By faith fill thy soul with a due consideration of that *provision* which is laid up in Jesus Christ for this end and purpose, that all thy lusts, this very lust wherewith thou art entangled, may be mortified. By faith ponder on this, that though thou art no way able in or by thyself to get the conquest over thy distemper, though thou art even weary of contending, and art utterly ready to faint, yet that there is enough in Jesus Christ to yield thee relief, Phil. 4:13.

Behold, the Lord Christ, that hath all fullness of grace in his heart, all fullness of power in his hand, he is able to slay all these his enemies. There is sufficient provision

in him for my relief and assistance. He can take my drooping, drying soul and make me more than a conqueror. 'Why sayest thou, O my soul, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?

(2.) Raise up thy heart by faith to an *expectation of relief* from Christ. Relief in this case from Christ is like the prophet's vision, Hab. 2:3, "It is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, yet wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Though it may seem somewhat long to thee, whilst thou art under thy trouble and perplexity, yet it shall surely come in the appointed time of the Lord Jesus; which is the best season.

But wilt thou say, "What ground have I to build such an expectation upon, so that I may expect not to be deceived?".....Let this, then, be fixed upon thy heart, that if thou hast not relief from him thou shalt never have any. All ways, endeavours, contendings, that are not animated by this expectation of relief from Christ and him only are to no purpose, will do thee no good; yea, if they are any thing but supportments of thy heart in this expectation, or means appointed by himself for the receiving help from him, they are in vain.

Now, farther to engage thee to this expectation, --

(1.) Consider his *mercifulness*, tenderness, and kindness, as he is our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Assuredly he pities thee in thy distress; saith he, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you,"

(2.) Consider His *faithfulness* who hath promised; which may raise thee up and confirm thee in this waiting in an expectation of relief. He hath promised to relieve in such cases, and he will fulfill his word to the utmost.

Now, there are two eminent advantages which always attend this expectation of succour from Jesus Christ:--

[1.] It engages him to a full and speedy assistance. Nothing doth more engage the heart of a man to be useful and helpful to another than his expectation of help from him, if justly raised and countenanced by him who is to give the relief. Our Lord Jesus hath raised our hearts, by his kindness, care, and promises, to this expectation; certainly our rising up unto it must needs be a great engagement upon him to assist us accordingly.

[2.] It engages the heart to attend diligently to all the ways and means whereby Christ is wont to communicate himself to the soul; and so takes in the real assistance of all graces and ordinances whatever. He that expects any thing from a man, applies himself to the ways and means whereby it may be obtained. The beggar that expects an alms lies at his door or in his way from whom he doth expect it. The way whereby and the means wherein Christ communicates himself is, and are, his ordinances ordinarily; he that expects any thing from him must attend upon him therein. It is the expectation that I speak of. If now there be any vigour, efficacy, and power in prayer or sacrament to this end of mortifying sin, a man will assuredly be interested in it all by this expectation of relief from Christ.

Now, on this direction for the mortification of a prevailing distemper you may have a thousand "probatum est's." Who have walked with God under this temptation, and have not found the use and success of it? I dare leave the soul under it, without adding any more. Only some particulars relating thereunto may be mentioned:--

First, Act faith *peculiarly upon the death*, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, on Christ as crucified and slain. Mortification of sin is peculiarly from the death of Christ, which shall assuredly be accomplished by it.

Whatever came upon our natures by his first temptation, whatever receives strength in our persons by his daily suggestions, Christ died to destroy it all. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Titus 2:14. This was his aim and intendment (wherein he will not fail) in his giving himself for us. That we might be freed from the power of our sins, and purified from all our defiling lusts, was his design.

Secondly, Then act faith on the death of Christ, and that under these two notions, -- first, In expectation of *power*; secondly, In endeavours for *conformity*. For the first, the direction given in general may suffice; as to the latter, that of the apostle may give us some light into our direction, Gal. 3:1. Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as he is set forth dying and crucified for us. Look on him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into thy heart by faith; apply his blood so shed to thy corruptions: do this daily. I might draw out this consideration to a great length, in sundry particulars, but I must come to a close

2. I have only, then, to add the heads of the work of the Spirit in this business of mortification, which is so peculiarly ascribed to him. In one word: This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is effected, carried on, and accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all the parts and degrees of it; as, --

(1.) He alone *clearly and fully convinces* the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the corruption, lust, or sin to be mortified.

(2.) **The Spirit alone reveals unto us *the fullness of Christ* for our relief;** which is the consideration that stays the heart from false ways and from despairing despondency, 1 Cor. 2:8.

(3.) **The Spirit alone *establishes* the heart in expectation of relief from Christ;** which is the great sovereign means of mortification, as hath been discovered, 2 Cor. 1:21.

(4.) **The Spirit alone brings the *cross* of Christ into our hearts with its sinkilling power;** for by the Spirit are we baptized into the death of Christ.

(5.) **The Spirit is the author and finisher of our *sanctification*;** gives new supplies and influences of grace for holiness and sanctification, when the contrary principle is weakened and abated, Eph. 3:16-18.

(6.) **In all the soul's addresses to God in this condition, it hath *supportment* from the Spirit.**

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Why is faith the only means through which mortification can take place?
- List out five things (from the many that Owen writes of in the first section) that we should think about as we consider the provision of Christ for mortification
- Give some textual evidence for Owen's assertion that if you have not relief from Christ you will never have any at all.
- What aspects of Christ's life and the biblical doctrine of the person and work of Christ give us encouragement to hope for and expect help from Christ?
- What specifics of the work of Christ should our faith act upon?
- Outline in your own words why we must depend upon the Spirit in mortification.
- How do we depend on the Spirit, or how do we receive the work of the Spirit in us unto mortification?