

A Summary of John Owen's work on
THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

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John Owen (1616-1683)

INTRODUCTION

It is evident in the shallowness of western Christianity that sin is not dealt with seriously in evangelism or in the battles of the Christian life, and many feel that John Owen is the man who can teach this generation much that is absent, to our lamentable weakness. *John Owen* (1616-1683) was perhaps the greatest theologian of the Puritan period. He was not a Presbyterian but an Independent, an advocate of the Congregational way of governing congregations. The Independents had a reputation for a greater measure of lightness and gaiety than the other Puritans. Owen treasured John Bunyan's preaching, and his affection was reciprocated by the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. They both shared the same printer.

The foundational distinctive Owen sets forth is this: sin continues to abide in the believer but it does not have dominion... it can tempt and seduce but it does not reign. Indwelling sin is a "law" in our members... it has power and we are always made aware of it throughout our Christian lives. Our inclination through the indwelling Spirit is to do good, but sin is there all the time. As we swim against the current of the world and the flesh we find how strong sin is. Sometimes irregular lusts trouble the Christian greatly, so sin is powerful, but it does not lord it over the believer.

The vital prescription is to mortify remaining sin. If that is not done the soul will be weakened like a cobweb. Mortifying sin serves our great end of glorifying God. The mortification of sin is a hope-encouraging teaching. If mortification is neglected we will be drawn away from God as indwelling sin lusts against the Spirit, fighting and seeking to take us captive in its rage and madness, to have us actually bear the yoke again. Indwelling sin is manifested in a consistent perpetual propensity and lust for evil within us. It is a deceiver within, enticing the mind and the affections.

Owen's work teaches us we have three needs – the need for *wisdom* to know our own hearts and Savior Christ better... the need for *watchfulness* to even die rather than yield one step to sin... and the need to be ever at *war*. Not to acknowledge this is the height of madness. We are to be killing sin or sin will be killing us. Owen offers his readers the big picture – he was not merely interested in seeing the believer abstain from a particular sin (or sins); for him, the whole goal of the Christian life was one of *Christlikeness*, which is only possible by intimately knowing Christ as He is revealed in the gospel.

The Bible calls Christians to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). In the opinion of the most respected scholars of our day, no theologian tackles this question better than the 17th century pastor John Owen, who became one of the most influential theologians since the Reformation. The late *C. S. Lewis* counseled Christians to not just read "new books," but also read "old books" like that of John Owen. He said, "Never allow yourself to read another new book until you have read an old one in between." *Jerry Bridges* comments on Owen's writings on the mortification of sin as "the most helpful writings on personal holiness ever written." Theologian *J. I. Packer* said he owes more to Owen's book on mortification than to any other book. Though reading Owen does require readers to think, says Packer, "one cannot rest until he has exhausted this work, because it so satisfying and refreshing." Most theologians agree that it is best to read Owen's work "*out loud*," because he wrote in a conversational style. That proved helpful to me. Incidentally, I undertook the summarization of Owen's work on mortification at the urging of a friend. In doing so I took the liberty to employ *contemporary idiom* when summarizing his work, rather than using the archaic Shakespearian language with which Owen wrote. I trust you will find both the content and style of writing beneficial to your understanding.

MORTIFICATION OF SIN

By John Owen

- Chapter 1 – The foundation of the whole ensuing discourse laid in Romans 8:13
- Chapter 2 – The principal assertion concerning the necessity of mortification proposed
- Chapter 3 – The Spirit the only author of this work
- Chapter 4 – The vigor and comfort of our spiritual lives depend on our mortification
- Chapter 5 – The principal intendment of the whole discourse proposed
- Chapter 6 – The mortification of sin in particular described
- Chapter 7 – General rules, without which no lust will be mortified
- Chapter 8 – Universal sincerity
- Chapter 9 – Consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust
- Chapter 10 – The guilt, the danger, and the evil of sin
- Chapter 11 – Five directions
- Chapter 12 – Thoughtfulness of the excellency of the majesty of God
- Chapter 13 – Precautions against false peace
- Chapter 14 – The necessity of faith on Christ

Chp 1 – The foundation of the whole ensuing discourse laid in Romans 8:13

What I have to contribute to the understanding of the believer's mortification, I lay the foundation of it in the words of the apostle Paul in Romans chapter eight, "If you by the Spirit are putting to death the deeds of the body you will live" (Rom 8:13). The apostle having recapped his doctrine of justification by faith, and the blessed state of those who are graciously made partakers of it (Rom 8:1-3), proceeds to improve upon it to the holiness and consolation of believers. Among his arguments and motives unto holiness, the verse mentioned contains one from the contrary events and effects of holiness and sin – "If you live according to the flesh, you shall die." As such, there are the following five things:

A. The DUTY prescribed: "If you put to death the deeds of the body." The first thing to notice is the conditional note – "If." Conditionals in such propositions may denote two things: The *uncertainty of the event* or thing promised; as one might say to a friend, "If you go to church you might find yourself a beautiful bride." This kind of condition lacks certainty and is clearly not what the apostle Paul intended. Or the conditional proposition might denote the *certainty of the connection* between the things spoken of; as one would say to a sick man, "If you will take this medicine, you will get well." The thing the individual intended to express is the certainty of the connection between the medicine and health. And this is the conditional proposition being made by the apostle Paul – the certain connection that exists between *putting to death (mortifying)* the deeds of the body and *living*. God has appointed this means for the attaining that end. The intendment, then, of this proposition as conditional is, that there is a certain infallible connection between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that end... if you mortify the indwelling power of sin, you shall live. And herein is the main motive for the duty prescribed.

B. The PERSONS are denoted to whom it is prescribed: "You" – "if you mortify." The *persons* to whom this duty is prescribed is included in the verb, "if you mortify the deeds of the body" – that is, you believers with whom "there is no condemnation" (Rom 8:1); you that are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom 8:9); you who are "made alive by the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:10-11). To apply this duty to

any other is to be a proponent of that superstition and self-righteousness that the world is full of, and make it the great work and design of men ignorant of the gospel (Rom 10:3, 4; Jn 15:5). This description of the persons denoted by the apostle Paul, is the main foundation of this ensuing discourse – *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.*

C. There is in them a PROMISE annexed to that duty: "You shall live." The principal *efficient cause* of the performance of this duty is the Spirit – "If by the Spirit;" i.e., the "Spirit of Christ" that indwells us (Rom 8:9); that gives life to us (Rom 8:11); that leads us (Rom 8:14); who gives us a spirit of adoption as sons (Rom 8:15); and who makes intercession for us (Rom 8:26). All other ways of mortification are vain and leave us helpless, and do not result in life – it must be done by the Holy Spirit. Men, as the apostle intimates (Rom 9:30-32), may attempt this work on other principles, as they always have done and continue to do, but says Owen, "*This is the work of the Spirit; by Him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about.*" Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world, and does not result in life.

D. The CAUSE or means of the performance of this duty is the Spirit: "If you by the Spirit."
Three things here need to be defined –

1. What is meant by "the body"? *The body* at the end of the verse is the same as *the flesh* at the beginning of the verse: "If you live according to the *flesh* you shall die; but if you by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the *body* you will live" – that is, of the flesh. *The body*, then, is that corruption and depravity of our natures whereby the body, in great part, is the seat and instrument of unrighteousness (Rom 6:19). It is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust, that is intended. The "body" here is the same as the "old man," and the "body of sin" (Rom 6:6); the whole corrupted person, and the seat of lusts and distempered affections.

2. What is meant by "the deeds of the body"? The Greek word chiefly denotes the outwards actions, "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19). Though the outward deeds are only expressed here, yet it must include the inward causes from whence they spring. The apostle calls them *deeds*, as that which every lust tends toward; though it do but conceive and prove abortive, its aim is to bring forth the fullness of sin. Having treated indwelling lust as the fountain and principle of all sinful actions, both in the seventh chapter of Romans and here at the beginning of the eighth chapter, Paul now mentions its destruction under the name of the effects which it produces (Rom 8:10) – "The body is dead because of sin."

3. What is meant by "mortifying them"? To *mortify* means to put to death." To kill something that is alive is to take away the principle of all its strength, vigor, and power, so that it cannot act or exert any action of its own. Indwelling sin is compared to a living person, called "the old man," with his faculties, properties, wisdom, craft, subtlety, and strength; this, says Paul, must be killed, put to death, mortified – that is, have its power, life, vigor, and strength, taken away by the Spirit. It is, indeed utterly mortified and slain by the cross of Christ; thus the "old man" is thence said to be "crucified with Christ" (Rom 6:6), and ourselves to be "dead" with him (Rom 6:8), and really initially takes place at regeneration (Rom 6:3-5), when a principle contrary to it, and destructive of it (Gal 5:17), is planted in our hearts – but the entire work... is by degrees, and is to be carried on to perfection all our days. The intendment of the apostle in this prescription of the duty is that *the mortification of*

indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies... that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh... that is the constant duty of believers.

E. The CONDITIONALITY of the entire proposition, wherein everything is contained: "If you."

The *promise* unto this duty is life – "*You shall live.*" The life promised is in contradistinction to the death threatened in the preceding clause – if you live according to the flesh, "*you shall die.*" Or as Paul says in Galatians, "You shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal 6:8), or destruction from God. The word may not only refer to eternal life, but also to that spiritual life which we have in Christ, and to the joy, comfort, and vigor of it; as the apostle says elsewhere – "You really live if you stand firm in the Lord," (1 Th 3:8); thus, you shall live and lead a good, vigorous, comfortable, spiritual life while you are here, and obtain eternal life hereafter. Reflecting upon the connection between mortification and eternal life, as of means and end, Owen adds a second motive to the duty prescribed – *The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.*

Chp 2 – The principal assertion concerning the necessity of mortification

Having laid this foundation, Owen chiefly intends the following three principles – they are stated in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

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

Paul writes to the Colossians, "Consider the members of your body as dead to immorality, impurity and all forms of evil" (Col 3:5). Of whom does he speak? Those who have been "raised with Christ" (Col 3:1); they "died" with Him (Col 3:3); they will "appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4). Put to death the deeds of the body every day; be always at this work while you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you! Being dead with Christ and being raised with Him, does not excuse you from this work. The Lord Jesus tells us how His Father deals with every living branch in Him that bears fruit: "He purgeth and prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (Jn 15:2). He doesn't just prune it for a day or two, but all the while it is a branch in this world. The apostle tells us what his practice was – "I buffet my body and make it my slave, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor 9:27). "This I do daily! it is the work of my life! I omit it not! this is my business!" (1 Cor 15:31). And if this were the work and business of Paul, who was so incomparably exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, consolations, above the ordinary measure of believers, how can we possibly think we are exempt from this work and duty while we are in this world? A brief account of the reasons for this work may be given –

A. Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world; therefore it is always to be mortified.

The vain, foolish and ignorant disputes of men about attaining perfection in this life, of being wholly and perfectly dead to sin, I now address. It is more than probable that such men never knew what it really meant to keep just one of God's commands – they are so far removed from perfection that they have never attained the perfection of a single part in obedience. Then there are those who have found out a "new way" to it – they simply deny original, indwelling sin; they are ignorant of the life of Christ and the power of it in believers, so they have invented a new righteousness that the gospel knows nothing of, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. For us who truly believe, we dare not be wise above what the Scriptures say, nor boast of what God has not done for us – the truth of the matter is, indwelling sin still lives in us, in some measure and degree, while we are in this world. As Paul says, "We dare not speak as though we have already attained, or were already perfect" (Phil 3:12). Our "inward

man is to be renewed day by day" while we live (2 Cor 4:16). While we are here we "know but in part" (1 Cor 13:12), having a remaining darkness to be gradually removed by our "growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18); and "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would" (Gal. 5:17); thus we are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light (1 Jn 1:8). We have a "body of death" (Rom 7:24) from which we shall not be delivered until we die (Phil 3:21). With that being said, it is our duty to continually give ourselves to the work of mortifying and killing sin while it is in us. We have been appointed to kill the enemy of our souls, if we fail to do so, we do but half the work (Gal 6:9; Heb 12:1; 2 Cor 7:1).

B. Sin not only still abides in us, it is still actively laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh.

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 where there is least suspicion. Sin not only abides in us, but "the law of the members of our body is still waging war against the law of our mind" (Rom 7:23); and that "God jealously desires His Spirit to dwell within us" (Jam 4:5). The flesh is always at work "lusting against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17) – lust is still tempting and conceiving sin (Jam 1:14); in every moral action it is always either inclining to evil, or hindering from that which is good, or disframing the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil – writes Paul, "The very evil which I wish I would not do, that I do" (Rom 7:19). Why is this? "Because in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18). "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would" (Gal 5:17). So sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and always tempting. This inward disposition of sin will wage war against us all our days. Therefore, if sin will be always acting, and if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures. He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance, will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish, in proceeding to the ruin thereof, can we expect to be pleasantly comfortable? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled... prevails or is prevailed on... and it will be so as long as we live in this world. Writes Owen: "I shall discharge him from this duty who can bring sin to a cessation... let him say to his soul, as to this duty, 'Soul, take thy rest.' The saints, whose souls breathe after deliverance from its perplexing rebellion, know that there is no safety against it but in constant warfare."

C. Sin not only strives, acts, rebels, troubles, and disquiets us, but if it is left alone and not continually mortified, it will *bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins*. The apostle tells us what the works and fruits of it are (Gal 5:19-21) – "The works of the flesh are evident; they are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." You know what it did in the lives of David and others. Sin always aims at the utmost – every time it rises up to tempt or entice or 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... every rise of lust desires to express itself to the full; it is like the grave, that is never satisfied. And therein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin, by which it prevails to the hardening of men, and so to their ruin (Heb 3:13) – it is modest, as it were, in its first motions and proposals, but having once got footing in the heart by them, it constantly makes good its ground, and presses on to far greater degrees in the same kind; it proceeds towards its height by degrees, making good the ground it achieved by hardness and deceitfulness. Nothing can prevent this but *mortification that withers the root* and strikes at the head of sin every hour. There is not the best saint in the world but, if he should give over this duty, would fall into as many cursed sins as ever anyone did of his kind.

D. This is one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit and the new nature are given to us, that we may have a principle within whereby to oppose sin and lust. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit... and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh" (Gal 5:17). There is a propensity in the Spirit, or spiritual new nature, to be acting against the flesh, and a propensity in the flesh to be acting against the Spirit. Therefore, applying all diligence, "in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control; and in your self-control, perseverance; and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness, love" (2 Pet 1:4,5). It is by participating with the divine nature that we escape the pollutions that are in the world through lust, and the law that is in our members to do unrighteousness (Rom 7:23). The most unjust, foolish, and unreasonable thing in the world is to *bind Him* who fights for our eternal condition, and *let him alone* who seeks and violently attempts to accomplish our everlasting ruin. The contest is for our lives and souls! Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin, is to neglect that excellent succor which God hath 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.

E. Negligence in this duty casts the soul into a perfect contrary condition to that which the apostle affirms was his (2 Cor 4:16) – "[By not neglecting this duty] "our *outward man* perishes, and the inward man is renewed day by day." On the other hand, by neglecting the battle of mortification, the *inward man* perishes, and the outward man is renewed day by day. Note the contrast. *Exercise* and *success* are the two main cherishers of grace in the heart; when it is suffered to lie still, it withers and decays – the things that remain are ready to die (Rev 3:2); sin gains ground towards the hardening of the heart (Heb 3:13). This is that which I intend: *by the omission of this duty grace withers, lust flourishes, and the frame of the heart grows worse and worse*. Where sin, through the neglect of mortification, gets a considerable victory, it breaks the bones of the soul (Ps 31:10), and makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die (Ps 38:3-5), so that he cannot look up (Ps 60:12; Is 33:24) — when poor creatures take blow after blow, wound after wound, foil after foil, and never raise themselves up to a vigorous opposition, can they expect any thing but to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and that their souls should bleed to death? (2 Jn 8). Indeed, it is a sad thing to consider the fearful issues of the neglect of this duty.

F. It is our duty to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," (2 Cor 7:1); to be "growing in grace" every day (1 Pet 2:3; 2 Pet 3:18); and to be "renewing our inward man day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). Now, this cannot be done without the daily mortifying of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness. Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in his life takes no steps towards his journey's end – without opposing it, and mortifying it, you cannot die to it or know peace.

Before I proceed to the consideration of the second principle, I cannot but complain of the many professors of the faith these days, who, instead of bringing forth such great and evident *fruits* of mortification as are expected, scarce bear any *leaves* of it. There is a noise of religion and religious duties in every corner, preaching in abundance – but if you will take the measure of them by this great *discriminating grace* of Christians, perhaps you will find their number not so many. Where almost is that professor (one who indeed professes to know God) who gives evidence of a *mortified life*? If the vain spending of time, idleness, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, and selfishness be the badges of Christians... and if it be so with them who have much light, and which, we hope, is saving, what shall we say of some who would be accounted religious and yet know nothing

more of mortification than to simply deny themselves some outward enjoyments? May the good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers, or we are in a sad condition! There are two evils which certainly attend every *unmortified professor* – the first, in respect to himself; and second, in respect to others —

1. In respect to himself. Some believers pretend to only have *slight thoughts of sin*; of sins of daily infirmity. The root of an *unmortified life* is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. When a man imagines the apprehension of grace and mercy so 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. At this door have gone out from us most of the professors that have apostatized in the days wherein we live. For a while most of them were under convictions that brought them to profession, so that they "escaped the pollutions that are in the world, through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 2:20) – but having become acquainted with the doctrine of the gospel, and become weary of duty, they began to neglect the doctrine of grace... when once this evil laid hold of them, they speedily tumbled into perdition.

2. In respect to others. It has an evil influence on them in two ways – First, *it hardens them*, by letting them think that they are in as good condition as the best professors. Whatever they see in themselves is so stained for want of mortification that it is of no value to them. They have a zeal for religion; but it is accompanied with a desire of forbearance and universal righteousness. They deny prodigality, but with worldliness... they separate from the world, but live wholly to themselves, taking no care to exercise loving-kindness in the earth... or they talk spiritually, and live vainly and in every way are conformed to the world; boasting of forgiveness of sin, and never forgiving others. Such poor creatures harden their hearts in their unregenerate ways. Second, *they deceive themselves* in making themselves believe that all shall be well with them; yet such unmortified walking does not result in eternal life.

Chp 3 – The Spirit the only author of this work

The second principle relates to the great *sovereign cause* of the mortification treated of; which is the Holy Spirit.

SECOND: Only the Holy Spirit is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without Him are as a thing of naught – He is the great efficient of it, and He works in us as pleaseth God.

A. In vain do men seek other remedies, but they shall not be healed by them. The greatest part of popish religion, of that which looks most like religion in their profession, consists in mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretence of their beautiful garments, whereby they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground – they are all for the mortification of sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotion, they look all this way. This is the substance and glory of their religion; and such glory is their shame. The means they invented for the mortification of sin are still insisted upon and prescribed by those who should have more light and a greater knowledge of the gospel. Even some professing Protestants have embraced such means to mortify sin – engaging in outside endeavors, bodily exercises, self-performances, and mere legal duties, without the least mention of Christ or His Spirit. The reasons why Papists can never, with all their endeavors, truly mortify any one sin are –

1. Because the ways and means they use and insist upon for this end were not appointed of God for that purpose. There is nothing in religion that has any efficacy for compassing an end, except which has been appointed by God for that purpose. Regarding the garments they wear, their vows, penances, disciplines, and their course of monastical life, God will say, "Who has required these things at your hand? In vain do you worship me, teaching as doctrine the traditions of men."

2. Because those things that are appointed of God as means are not used by them in their due place and order – such as are praying, fasting, watching, meditation, and the like. Whereas these things effect and accomplish the end as *means* only, subordinate to the Spirit and faith, these religionists look on these things to do the work of mortification by virtue of the effort put forth. If they fast so much, and pray so much, and keep their hours and times, the work is done. As the apostle says of some in another case, "They are always learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth" – so also, they are ever mortifying, but never arriving at any sound mortification. In a word, they have sundry means to mortify the natural man, but none to mortify lust or corruption. This is the general mistake of men ignorant of the gospel of grace. What horrible self-macerations were practiced by some of the ancient authors of monastical devotion! What extremity of sufferings did they put upon themselves! Search their ways and principles to the bottom, and you will find that it had no other root but this mistake, namely, that attempting rigid mortification, they fell upon the natural man instead of the corrupt old man, upon the body wherein we live instead of the body of death. *Duties are excellent food for an unhealthy soul*; they are no physic for a sick soul. Spiritually sick men cannot sweat out their distemper with working. But this is the way of men who deceive their own souls; as we shall see afterward. That none of these ways are sufficient is evident from the nature of the work itself that is to be done – it is a work that requires an almighty energy for its accomplishment.

B. Therefore, it is the work of the Spirit. He is the *promise* of God given to us to for this work. The taking away of the stony heart – that is, the stubborn, proud, rebellious, unbelieving heart – is in general the work of mortification that we treat of. This work can only be done by the Spirit who was promised to us centuries ago (Ezek 11:19; 36:26) – "I will give you My Spirit, and take away your stony heart;" and by the Spirit of God is this work wrought when all means fail (Is 57:17-18). We all have our mortification from the *gift* of Christ – "Without Christ we can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). All acts of grace are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit – He alone works in and upon us to accomplish His transforming purposes. The resolution of the following two questions will now lead me nearer to what I principally intended —

First, "How does the Spirit mortify sin?" Owen answers this in three ways –

(a) By causing our hearts to abound in *grace* and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh (Gal 5: 19-23). The fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary to those of the flesh – they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. This "renewing of us by the Holy Spirit," as it is called (Tit 3:5) is one great way of mortification; He causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.

(b) By a *real physical efficiency on the root and habit of sin*, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away. Hence He is called a "Spirit of judgment and burning" (Is 4:4), really consuming

and destroying our lusts. He takes away the stony heart by an almighty efficiency, and carries out this work by degrees. He is the fire which burns up the very root of lust.

(c) He brings the *cross of Christ* into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in His death, and fellowship in His sufferings.

Secondly, if this be the work of the Spirit alone, “How is it that we are exhorted to it?” – Since only the Spirit of God can do this work, let it be left wholly to Him.

(a) All of the graces and good works which are in us are those of the Holy Spirit. He "works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure" (Phil 2:13); He works "all our works in us" (Is 26:12); "the work of faith with power" (2 Th 1:11; Col 2:12); He causes us to pray, and is a "Spirit of supplication" (Rom 8:26; Zech 12:10); and yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted, to all these.

(b) He does the work mortification in us but not apart from our *active obedience*. The Holy Spirit works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures – He works *in us* and *with us*... not *against us* or *without us* – His assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work. I want to bewail here the endless, foolish labor of poor souls, who strive to keep sin down in their lives by innumerable perplexing ways and duties, but are strangers to the work of the Holy Spirit – thus all their efforts are in vain. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days. They spend their strength for that which does not profit. This is the saddest warfare that any poor creature can be engaged in. A soul under the power of conviction from the law is pressed to fight against sin, but has no strength for such combat. They cannot but fight, but they can never conquer. The *law* drives them on, and sin beats them back... and the lusts which they had hoped to slay suffer not a wound.

Chp 4 – The vigor & comfort of our spiritual lives depend on our mortification

THIRD: The life, vigor, and comfort of our spiritual life depends much on our mortification of sin.

Strength and comfort, and power and peace, in our walking with God, are the things of our desires. Were any of us asked seriously, what it is that troubles us, we must refer it to one of these – either we want strength or power, vigor and life, in our obedience, in our walking with God... or we want peace, comfort, and consolation therein. Whatever it is that befalls a believer that does not belong to one of these two things, does not deserve to be mentioned in the days of our complaints. Now, all of these things depend on a constant course of mortification. Concerning which observe –

I do not say they proceed from it, as though they were necessarily tied to it. A man may be carried on in a constant course of mortification all his days; and yet perhaps never enjoy a good day of peace and consolation. So it was with Heman (Ps 88) – his life was a life of perpetual mortification and walking with God, yet terrors and wounds were his portion all his days. But God singled out Heman, a choice friend, to make an example to them that afterward should be in distress. Can we complain if it be the same with us as it was with Heman, that eminent servant of God? God makes it His prerogative to speak peace and consolation to the soul (Is 57:18, 19) – "I will do that work," says God, "I will comfort

him" (v. 18). But how? The *use of means* for the obtaining of peace is ours, but the *bestowing* of it is God's prerogative. In our ordinary walking with God, and in an ordinary course of His dealing with us, the vigor and comfort of our spiritual lives depend much on our mortification – it has a strong effectual influence.

Every “unmortified sin” will certainly do two things – It will *weaken* the soul, and deprive it of its vigor and strength... and it will *darken* the soul, and deprive it of its comfort and peace. When David had for a while harbored an unmortified lust in his heart, it broke all his bones, and left him without any spiritual strength; hence he complained that he was sick, weak, wounded, and faint – "There is no soundness in me" (Ps 38:3); "I am feeble and crushed" (v. 8); "I cannot so much as look up" (Ps 40:12). An unmortified lust will drink up the spirit, and all the vigor of the soul, and weaken it for all duties. For –

1. It *untunes* and unframes the heart by entangling its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual frame that is required for vigorous communion with God; it lays hold on the *affections*, rendering its object beloved and desired, so expelling the love of the Father (1 Jn 2:15; 3:17); so that the soul cannot say uprightly and truly to God, "Thou art my portion," having something else that it loves.
2. It fills the *thoughts* with contrivances about it. Thoughts are the great purveyors of the soul to bring in the provision to satisfy its affections; and if sin remains unmortified in the heart, they must ever be making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. They must glaze, adorn, and dress the objects of the flesh, and bring them home to give satisfaction; and this they are able to do, in the service of a defiled imagination.
3. It breaks out and actually *hinders duty*. The ambitious man must be studying, and the worldling must be working or contriving, and the sensual person providing himself for vanity... when, in fact, they should all be engaged in the worship of God.

Just as sin *weakens* the soul, so it also *darkens* the soul. It is a thick cloud that spreads itself over the face of the soul, and intercepts all the beams of God's love and favor. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption; and if the soul begins to gather up thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them. In this regard does the vigor and power of our spiritual life depend on our mortification – it is the only means of the removal of that which will allow us neither strength or power. Men that are sick and wounded under the power of lust make many applications for help – they cry to God when the perplexity of their thoughts overwhelms them, but are not delivered... in vain do they use many remedies, but they are not healed. "Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound" (Hos 5:13), and they attempted sundry remedies, but nothing will do until they come (v. 15) to "acknowledge their offences." Men may see their sickness and wounds, but if they do not make due applications, their cures will not be effected. Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them in our hearts to grow. The life and vigor of our spiritual lives consists in the vigor and flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts.

As you may see in a garden with a precious herb plant, let the ground be untilled, and weeds will engulf it – perhaps the herb plant will live still, but it will be a poor, withering, unuseful thing. So it is with the graces of the Spirit that are planted in our hearts. Though it is true, they do abide in a heart where there is some neglect of mortification; nevertheless, they are ready to die (Rev 3:2) – they are withering and decaying. The heart becomes like the sluggard's field: so overgrown with weeds that you can scarce see the good corn. Such a man may search for faith, love, and zeal, and scarce

be able to find any; and if he does discover that these graces are there yet alive and sincere, yet they are so weak, so clogged with lusts, that they are of very little use. Therefore let the heart be cleansed by mortification, and the weeds of lust constantly and daily rooted up (as they spring *daily*, nature being their proper soil); let room be made for grace to thrive and flourish. Mortification is the soul's vigorous opposition to self, wherein sincerity is most evident.

Chp 5 – The principal intendment of the whole discourse proposed

I now come to my principal intention, of handling some questions or practical cases that present themselves in this business of mortification of sin in believers. The first and most important is found in the following proposal: Suppose a man is a true believer, and yet finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin, leading him captive to the law of it, consuming his heart with trouble, perplexing his thoughts, weakening his soul as to duties of communion with God, disquieting him as to peace, and perhaps defiling his conscience, and exposing him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin – what shall he do? What course shall he take and insist on for the mortification of this sin, lust, distemper, corruption? to such a degree as that, though it be not utterly destroyed, yet, in his contest with it, he may be enabled to keep up significant power, strength, and peace in communion with God? In answering this inquiry, Owen does so in the next six chapters (chapters 5-10) under the following three headings –

1. Show what it is to both negatively and positively mortify any sin – *Chp 5-6*
2. The guidelines for mortifying sin without which it is impossible – *Chp 7-8*
3. The particulars whereby the mortifying of sin is to be done – *Chp 9-10*

I. SHOW WHAT IT IS TO BOTH NEGATIVELY AND POSITIVELY MORTIFY ANY SIN (Chapters 5-6).

A. To mortify a sin is not to utterly kill, root it out, and destroy it, that it should have no more hold at all nor residence in our hearts. It is true this is that which is aimed at, but this is not (in this life) to be accomplished. There is no man that truly sets himself to mortify any sin, but he aims at, intends, desires its utter destruction, that it should leave neither root nor fruit in the heart or life. He would so kill it that it should never move nor stir any more, cry or call, seduce or tempt, to eternity. Its complete eradication is the thing aimed at. Though there may be a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any particular sin, so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it, yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should no longer exist, is not a possible condition in this life – as such, we are to “fight to the end!” This Paul assures us of: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect” (Phil 3:12). He was a *choice saint*, a pattern for believers in faith and love and all the fruits of the Spirit, yet he had not “attained,” nor was he “perfect” (v. 15), but was “following after” – he still had a vile body like we have, that will be fully changed by the great power of Christ on the last day (v. 21).

B. To mortify sin is not the *dissimulation* of a sin. When a man on some outward respects forsakes the practice of any sin, men perhaps may look on him as a changed man. God knows that to his former iniquity he has added cursed hypocrisy, and is now in a safer path to hell than he was in before. He now has another heart than the one he had, one that is more cunning – not a new heart that is more holy.

C. The mortification of sin does not consist in the improvement of a *quiet, sedate* nature. Some men have an advantage by their natural constitution so far as that they are not exposed to such violence

of unruly passions and tumultuous affections as many others are. Let now these men cultivate and improve their *natural frame* and temper by discipline, consideration, and prudence, and they may seem to themselves and others very mortified men, when perhaps, their hearts in reality are a standing sink of all abominations. Some men may never experience much trouble in their lives with anger and passion, like others experience almost every day – yet the latter may have done considerably more to the mortification of the sin than the former. Let not such persons judge their mortification by such things as their *natural temper* gives no life or vigor to – let them bring themselves to self-denial, unbelief, envy, or some such spiritual sin, and they will have a better view of themselves.

D. A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted. Simon Magus for a season left his *sorceries*; but his *covetousness and ambition* still remained. A man may be sensible of a lust, set himself against the eruptions of it, take care that it shall not break forth as it has done, but in the meantime suffer the same corrupted habit to vent itself some other way; as he who heals and skins a running sore thinks himself cured, but in the meantime his flesh festers by the corruption of the same humor, and breaks out in another place. Furthermore, men in age do not usually persist in the pursuit of youthful lusts, although they have never mortified any one of them. And the same is the case of other lusts – leaving one lust to serve another. He that changes pride for worldliness... sensuality for Pharisaism... vanity in himself to the contempt of others – let him not think that he has mortified the sin that he seems to have left. He has simply changed masters, and is a servant still.

E. Occasional conquests of sin do not amount to a mortifying of it. There are two occasions or seasons wherein a man who is contending with any sin may seem to himself to have mortified it. The first is this: When it has had some sad *eruption*, to the disturbance of his peace, terror of his conscience, dread of scandal, and evident provocation of God. This awakens and stirs up all that is in the man, and amazes him, fills him with abhorrency of sin, and himself for it; sends him to God, makes him cry out as for life, to abhor his lust as hell, and to set himself against it. The whole man, spiritual and natural, being now awaked, sin shrinks in its head, appears not, but lies as dead before him – yet with firm resolution to do the same thing again upon like opportunity. So it is in a person when a breach has been made upon his conscience, carefulness, indignation, desire, fear, revenge, are all set on work about it and against it, and lust is quiet for a season; but when the hurry is over and the inquest past, it appears again alive, and is as busy as ever at its work.

The second occasion is this: In a time of some *judgment*, calamity, or pressing affliction; the heart is then taken up with thoughts and contrivances of flying from the present troubles, fears & dangers. This, as a convinced person concludes, is to be done only by relinquishment of sin, which gains peace with God. It is the *anger of God* in every affliction that galls a convinced person. To be relieved of this, men resolve at such times against their sins – sin shall never more have any place in them; they will never again give up themselves to the service of it. Accordingly, sin is quiet, stirs not, seems to be mortified – the soul has simply possessed its faculties, whereby it naturally exerts itself... but when they are laid aside, however, sin returns again to its former life and vigor. I don't doubt their sincerity when they sought, and returned, and inquired after God... that they did it with full purpose of heart as to the relinquishment of their sins... and that they did so with earnestness and diligence; yet their sin was unmortified for all this (cf. Ps 78:32-37). This is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction, and a great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves oftentimes lies herein. These and many other ways there are whereby poor souls deceive themselves, and suppose they have mortified their lusts.

Chp 6 – The mortification of sin in particular described

The mortification of a lust consists in three things –

A. A habitual weakening of it. Every lust is a depraved habit or disposition, continually inclining the heart to evil. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). He is always under the power of a strong bent and inclination to sin. And the reason why a natural man is not always perpetually in the pursuit of some one lust, night and day, is because he hath many to serve, every one crying to be satisfied; thus he is carried on with great variety, but still in general he lies towards the satisfaction of self. We will suppose that the lust or distemper whose mortification is inquired after to be in itself a strong, deeply-rooted, habitual inclination and bent of the will and the affections unto some actual sin... and is always stirring up imaginations, thoughts, and contrivances about the object under consideration. Hence, men are said to have their "hearts set upon evil," and "making provision for the flesh." A sinful depraved habit differs from all natural or moral habits which incline the soul gently and suitably to itself; sinful habits, on the other hand, impel with violence and impetuosity; thus lusts are said to fight or wage "war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11; Rom 7:23). Paul describes it as that which darkens the mind, dethrones reason, extinguishes convictions, interrupts the power and influence of any considerations that may be brought to hamper it, and breaks through all into a flame. The first thing in mortification is the *weakening* of the indwelling *principle of sin*, whereby it inclines, entices, impels to evil, rebels, opposes, fights against God, as naturally it is apt to do (Jam 1:14-15). It is the *principle of grace* that stands in direct opposition to it and is destructive of it. Owen gives a word of caution at this point –

Some lusts are far more sensible and discernible in their violent actings than others. Paul puts a difference between uncleanness and all other sins (1 Cor 6:18) – "Flee immorality; every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." Thus, the motions of that sin are more sensible, more discernible than of others; when perhaps the love of the world, or the like, is in a person no less habitually predominant than that, yet it makes not so great a combustion in the whole man. Some men may battle with a lust that is no less predominant, only their lusts involve things that do not raise such a tumult in the soul; hence, they are exercised with a calmer frame of spirit, the very fabric of nature not being nearly so concerned in them as in another.

Another consideration: As a man *nailed to the cross* initially struggles, and strives, and cries out with great strength and might... but as his blood and spirits drain away, his strivings are more faint and less often, and his cries become lower and more hoarse, to the point that he can scarcely be heard. Conversely, when a man first sets upon a lust or distemper, to deal with it, it struggles with great violence to break loose; it cries with earnestness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved; but when by mortification the blood and spirits of it are let out, it moves more slowly and faintly, crying sparingly, and is scarce heard in the heart; it may have sometimes a dying pang, that makes an appearance of great vigor and strength, but it is quickly over, especially if it be kept from considerable success. This the apostle describes in the whole chapter of Romans Six (cf. Rom 6:6).

The power of sin is weakened and abolished little by little, that "henceforth we should not serve sin;" that sin would not incline and impel us with such efficacy as to make us servants to it, as it has done in the past. It should also be remembered that a man may beat down the bitter fruit from an evil tree until he is weary... while the root of the tree remains strong and vigorous, the beating down of the present fruit will not hinder it from bringing forth more fruit. This is the folly of some men –

they set themselves with all earnestness and diligence against the appearing eruption of lust, but leave the principle and the root untouched; thus making little progress in the work of mortification.

B. A constant fighting and contending against sin. When sin is strong and vigorous, the soul is scarce able to make any headway against it – it sighs, and groans, and mourns, and is troubled, as David says. He complains that his sin has "overtaken him so that he is not able to look up" (Ps 40:12). How little, then, was he able to fight against it! The spirit (or new man) is to *promptly and vigorously* contend with the lusts of the flesh, by all the ways and with all the means that have been appointed thereunto. Several things are required unto and comprised in this fighting against sin –

1. To know that a man indeed has such an enemy to deal with... to consider it as an enemy that must be destroyed by all means possible is required. As previously stated, the contest is vigorous and hazardous – it is about the things of eternity. When men have slight and transient thoughts of their lusts, that is no great sign that they have been mortified. Every man must "know the plague of his own heart" (1 Kg 8:38); without such knowledge no other work can be done. In actuality, very few are knowledgeable of the main enemy they carry about with them in their bosoms. As such, they are ready to justify themselves, and to be impatient of reproof or admonition, not knowing that they are in any danger (2 Ch 16:10).

2. To labor to be acquainted with the ways, wiles, methods, and occasions of its success, is the beginning of this warfare. This is the way men deal with their enemies – they inquire of wise counsel, ponder their ends, and consider how and by what means they have formerly prevailed. In this consists the greatest skill in conduct. Take this away, and all waging of war would be brutish. Such is the strategy of those who mortify their lusts – not only when they are actually vexing, enticing, and seducing, but when are quiet they consider, "This is the enemy; this is his way and progress, these are his advantages, thus hath he prevailed, and thus he will do, if not prevented." So one of the choicest and most eminent parts of practical spiritual wisdom consists in finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin, and reflecting upon where its greatest strength lies – what advantage it uses to make of occasions, opportunities, temptations – and what are its pleas, pretences, reasonings, stratagems, and excuses... and to set the wisdom of the Spirit against the craft of the *old man*; and to be able to say to ones inner man, "This is the old way and course that you aim at." To be always in *readiness* is a good part of our warfare.

3. To fight against it daily with all the things that are grievous and destructive to it – this is the height of this contest. Such a one never thinks his lust dead because it is quiet, but labors still to give it new wounds, new blows every day; like the apostle Paul (Col 3:5). While the soul is in this condition, and is thus being dealt with, sin is dying under the sword.

C. A frequent success. Frequent success against any lust is another evidence of mortification. By success I don't mean to merely disappoint sin or to keep it at bay; rather it is to achieve a complete conquest and have victory over it. For instance, when the heart finds sin at any time at work, seducing, forming imaginations to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof, it instantly apprehends sin, and brings it to the law of God and love of Christ, condemns it, and follows it with execution to the uttermost. When a man comes to this state that lust is weakened in the root and principle, that its motions and actions are fewer and weaker than formerly, so that they are not able to hinder his duty or interrupt his peace – when he can, in a quiet, sedate frame of spirit, find out and fight against sin, and

have success against it – then sin is mortified in some considerable measure, and notwithstanding all its opposition, a man may have peace with God all his days.

Chp 7 – General rules, without which no lust will be mortified

II. THE GUIDELINES FOR MORTIFYING SIN WITHOUT WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

(Chapters 7-8). The *ways* and *means* whereby a soul may proceed to the mortification of any particular lust and sin, which Satan takes advantage by to disquiet and weaken him, is our next consideration. General rules and principles, without which no sin will be ever mortified, are these –

A. Unless a man is a genuine believer – in Christ – he cannot mortify a single sin (Chapter 7).

Mortification is the work of believers (Rom. 8:13). They alone are exhorted to it: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col 3:5). Who should mortify? You who "are risen with Christ" (Rom 8:1); whose "life is hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3); who "shall appear with Him in glory" (v. 4). An unregenerate man may do something like it in his own striving, but not so as to be acceptable to God. The philosophers of old – Seneca, Tully, Epictetus – affectionately had contempt for the world and self, and wrote of regulating and conquering all their exorbitant affections and passions! The lives of most of them manifested that their maxims differed as much from true mortification as the sun painted on a sign-post from the sun in the firmament – they had neither light nor heat. *There is no death of sin without the death of Christ.* You are also familiar with the attempts made by the Papists, in their vows, penances, and satisfactions. I dare say of them who act upon such principles, what Paul says of Israel in point of righteousness (Rom 9:31, 32) – They have followed after mortification, but they have not attained to it. Why? "Because they seek it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." It is the believer's duty to mortify sin, but to do it God's way.

I have proved that it is the Spirit alone who can mortify sin; all other means without Him are empty and vain. How shall he mortify sin that hath not the Spirit? A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit. Now, how is He attained? The Spirit alone provides the power for mortification. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8). If we are in the flesh, if we have not the Spirit, we cannot do any thing that should please God. But "those who have the Spirit of Christ are not in the flesh" (Rom 8:9). All attempts for mortification of any lust, without an interest in Christ, are vain. Many men that are galled with and for sin, the arrows of Christ for conviction, by the preaching of the word, or some affliction having been made sharp in their hearts, do vigorously set themselves against this or that particular lust, where-with their consciences have been most disquieted or perplexed – but, poor creatures! they labor in the fire, and their work is consumed! When the Spirit of Christ comes to this work He will be "like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap," and He will purge men as gold and as silver (Mal 3:2,3) – take away their dross and tin, their filth and blood (as Is 4:4); but men must first be gold and silver in the bottom, or else refining will do them no good. The prophet gives us the sad issue of wicked men's utmost attempts for mortification by all contrary means (Jer 6:29-30) – "The bellows are burned, and the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." And what is the reason? (v. 28) – They were "brass and iron" when they were put into the furnace. Men may refine brass and iron forever but it will never become gold and silver.

I say, then, mortification is not the present business of unregenerate men – *conversion* is their work, not the mortification of any particular lust. One doesn't begin to erect a building without first

pouring the foundation – such a building cannot stand. When the Jews, upon the conviction of their sin, were cut to the heart (Acts 2:37), they cried out: "What shall we do?" What does Peter direct them to do? Does he bid them go and mortify their pride, wrath, malice, cruelty, and the like? No, he knew that was not their present work – he calls them to conversion and faith in Christ (v. 38). Let the soul be first thoroughly converted, and then, "looking on Him whom they had pierced," humiliation and mortification will ensue. The Pharisees had been laying heavy burdens, imposing tedious duties, and rigid means of mortification, in fastings, washings, and the like, all in vain. Says our Savior, "Do men gather grapes from thorns?" (Mt 7:16). But suppose a thorn be well pruned and cut, and have pains taken with him? "Yea, but he will never bear figs" (vv. 17, 18) – every tree will bring forth fruit according to its own kind. What is then to be done? (Mt 12:33) – "Make the tree good, and his fruit will be good." The root must be dealt with, the nature of the tree changed, or no good fruit will be brought forth. Unless a man be regenerate, all such diligence, earnestness, watchfulness, and intention of mind and spirit will be of no purpose. In vain shall he use many remedies; he shall not be healed. Of such a person Owen writes –

Mortification is the work of faith, the peculiar work of faith. Now, if there be a work to be done that will be effected by only one instrument, it is the greatest madness for any to attempt the doing of it that hath not that instrument. Now, it is faith that purifies the heart (Acts 15:9); or, as Peter speaks, "we purify our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet 1:22) – without it, it is not done.

Chp 8 – Universal sincerity

B. Without sincerity and diligent obedience, the mortification of any lust at all is not possible (Chapter 8). When a man finds a powerful, vexing, disquieting lust in himself that takes away his peace, and he is not able to bear it... and he prays against it, groans under it, and sighs to be delivered from it, yet in other duties (like reading, prayer, and meditation) he is loose and negligent... let not that man think that ever he shall arrive at the mortification of the lust that perplexes him. This is a common condition that befalls men in their pilgrimage. The Israelites, under a sense of their sin, drew nigh to God with much diligence and earnestness, with fasting and prayer (Is 58:2) – "They seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways; they ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." But God rejects all. Their fast is a remedy that will not heal them, and the reason given of it (vv. 5-7) is, because they attended diligently to that particular duty, but in others were negligent and careless. He that hath a "running sore" (it is the Scripture expression) upon him, arising from an ill habit of body, contracted by intemperance and ill diet, let him apply himself with what diligence and skill he can to *the cure of his sore*, if he leave *the general habit of his body* under distempers, his labor and travail will be in vain. So will his attempts be that shall endeavor to stop a bloody issue of sin and filth in his soul, and is not equally careful of his universal spiritual temperature and constitution. For –

1. This kind of endeavor for mortification proceeds from a *corrupt principle*, ground, and foundation; so that it will never proceed to a good issue. The true and acceptable principles of mortification must be insisted upon – hatred of all sin lies at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification. Therefore, when you set yourself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify a particular lust or sin, what is the reason of it? it disquiets you? it has taken away your peace? it fills your heart with sorrow, and trouble, and fear? you have no rest because of it? But if you have neglected prayer and the Word, and have been vain and loose in other things, that have not been of the same

nature with that particular lust wherewith you art perplexed... these are no less sins and evils than those of which you groan... why dost thou not set thyself against them also? Jesus Christ bled for them also. If you really hate sin and every evil way, you would be no less watchful against every thing that grieves and disquiets your own soul. If this be the case, it is evident that you contend against *sin* merely because of your own *trouble* by it. If your conscience was quiet under it, you would leave it alone. Did it not disquiet you, it should not be disquieted by you. Do you really think that God will set in with such hypocritical behaviors? Do you think He will ease thee of that which perplexes you, that you mayst be at liberty to that which no less grieves him? Absolutely not. Says God, "*Here is one, if he could be rid of this lust I should never hear of him more; let him wrestle with this, or he is lost.*" Let not any man think to do his own work that will not do God's work. God's work consists in *universal obedience* – not just to be freed from only their present perplexity. Hence is the injunction of the apostle (2 Cor 7:1) – "Cleanse yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." If we will do *any thing*, we must do *all things*. Therefore, it is not only an intense opposition to a peculiar lust, but a universal humble frame and temper of heart, with watchfulness over *every evil* and for the performance of every duty, that is accepted.

2. How do you know but that God hath suffered the lust wherewith you have been perplexed to get strength in you, and power over you, to chasten you for thy *other negligences* and common lukewarmness in walking before him; at least to awaken you to the consideration of your ways, that you mayst make a thorough work and change in your course of walking with him? The rage and predominancy of a particular lust is commonly the fruit and issue of a careless, negligent course in general. Lust, as I showed in general, lies in the heart of every one, even the best, while he lives; and think not that the Scripture speaks in vain, that it is subtle, cunning, crafty – that it seduces, entices, fights, rebels. While a man keeps a diligent watch over his heart, its root and fountain – whence are the issues of life and death – lust withers and dies in it. But if, through negligence, it makes an eruption any particular way, gets a passage to the thoughts by the affections, and from them and by them perhaps breaks out into open sin in one's life, the strength of it then vexes and disquiets, and is not easily to be restrained: thus, perhaps, a man may be put to wrestle all his days in sorrow with that which, by a strict and universal watch, might easily have been prevented.

As I said, God oftentimes suffers it to *chasten our other negligences*: for as with wicked men, He gives them up to *one* sin as the judgment of another, *a greater for the punishment of a less*, or one that will hold them more firmly and securely for that which they might have possibly obtained a deliverance from; so even with His own, He may sometimes leave them to some vexatious distempers to prevent or cure some other evil. So was the messenger of Satan let loose on Paul, that he "might not be lifted up through the abundance of spiritual revelations." Was it not a correction to Peter's vain confidence, that he was left to deny his Master? Now, if this be the state and condition of lust in its prevalency, that God oftentimes suffers it so to prevail, at least to admonish us, and to humble us, perhaps to chasten and correct us for our general loose and careless walking, is it possible that the *effect* should be removed and the *cause* continued – that the *particular* lust should be mortified and the *general* course be unreformed? He then who would thoroughly and acceptably mortify any disquieting lust, let him take care to be equally diligent in *all parts of obedience*, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God. While there abides a treachery in the heart to neglect the universal eradication of all sin and the perfection of total obedience... the soul is *weak*, as not giving faith its whole work... the soul is *selfish*, as considering more the trouble of

sin than the filth and guilt of it... and the soul lives under a constant *provocation* of God, so that it may not expect to be comforted in a limited particular spiritual duty that it undertakes.

Chp 9 – Consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust

III. THE PARTICULARS WHEREBY THE MORTIFYING OF SIN IS TO BE DONE –

(Chapters 9-10). The foregoing *general rules* being supposed, *particular directions* to the soul for its guidance under the sense of a disquieting lust or distemper is the next thing to be considered. **FIRST** consider what dangerous *symptoms* your lust has accompanying it, whether it has a deadly mark on it or not – if it does, *extraordinary* remedies are to be used; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it. You ask, "What are these dangerous marks and *symptoms*, the desperate attendancies of an indwelling lust, that you intend?" Let me name some of them –

A. Inveterateness – If it has for a long season been corrupting in your heart, without attempting vigorously the killing of it, and the healing of the wounds by it, your distemper is dangerous. Hast thou permitted worldliness, ambition, greediness of study, to eat up other duties, the duties wherein thou oughtest to hold constant communion with God, for some long season? or uncleanness to defile your heart with vain, and foolish, and wicked imaginations for many days? If this be the case, your lust hath a dangerous symptom. So was the case with David (Ps 38:5) – "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." When a lust lays long in the heart, corrupting, festering, cankering, it brings the soul to a woeful condition. In such a case an ordinary course of humiliation will not do the work. Whatever it be, it will by this means insinuate itself more or less into all the faculties of the soul; it grows familiar to the mind and conscience, that they do not startle at it as a strange thing, but are actually bold with it; yea, it will take advantage of such to exert itself without the individual giving serious consideration to it. Unless some extraordinary course be taken, such a person hath no ground in the world to expect that his latter end shall be peace. How will he be able to distinguish between the long abode of an *unmortified lust* and the *dominion of sin*, which cannot befall a regenerate person? How can he promise himself that it shall ever be otherwise with him, or that his lust will cease tumultuating and seducing, when he sees it fixed and abiding, and hath done so for a good period of time? Old neglected wounds are often mortal, always dangerous. Indwelling distempers grow rusty and stubborn by continuance in ease and quiet. Lust is such an inmate as will not easily be ejected, if it can plead time and some prescription. As it never dies of itself... so if it be not killed daily it will always gather strength.

B. The heart secretly pleases to countenance itself, and keep up its peace, irrespective of an abiding sin or lust, and a vigorous attempt to have it mortified – this is another dangerous symptom of a deadly distemper in the heart. There are several ways that this may be done. I shall name some of them –

1. When reflecting upon perplexing thoughts about sin, instead of applying himself to the destruction of it, a man searches his heart to see what evidences he can find of a good condition, irrespective of that sin and lust, so that it may go well with him. It is an excellent thing to bring to mind the faithfulness of God in a difficult and trying part of one's journey... but to do so to satisfy one's conscience and quiet one's heart – this is a desperate device of a heart in love with sin. When a man's conscience shall deal with him, when God shall rebuke him for the sinful distemper of his heart, if he, instead of applying himself to get that sin *pardoned* in the blood of Christ and *mortified* by his Spirit, shall relieve himself by any *such other evidences* as he has, or thinks himself to have,

and so disentangles himself from under the yoke that God was putting on his neck, his condition is very dangerous, and his wound hardly curable. Thus the Jews, under the gallings of their own consciences and the convincing preaching of our Savior, supported themselves with this, that they were "Abraham's children," and on that account accepted with God; and so countenanced themselves in all abominable wickedness, to their utter ruin. Love of sin, undervaluation of peace and of all tastes of love from God, are enwrapped in such a frame. Such a one strives to be contented and unfruitful in the world, satisfied to live at a distance from God that is not final separation. What can one expect from such a heart?

2. By applying grace and mercy to an "unmortified sin," when one is not *sincerely* endeavoring to mortify it, this is a sign of a heart greatly entangled with the love of sin. When a man has secret thoughts in his heart, not unlike those of Naaman about his worshipping in the house of Rimmon, "In all other things I will walk with God, but in this thing, God be merciful unto me," his condition is sad. For one to indulge himself in any sin on the account of mercy, without a doubt is altogether inconsistent with Christian sincerity, and is a badge of a hypocrite, and is the "turning of the grace of God into wantonness;" yet through the craftiness of Satan some believers may at time find themselves ensnared in such deceitfulness of sin, or else Paul would never have so cautioned them against it as he does (Rom 6:1-2). Yea, indeed, there is nothing more natural than for fleshly reasonings to grow high and strong upon this account. The flesh would gladly be indulged unto upon the account of grace, and every word that is spoken of mercy, it stands ready to pervert it for its own corrupt aims and purposes. To apply mercy, then, to a sin not vigorously mortified is to fulfill the *flesh's* end for the gospel. These and many other ways and wiles a deceitful heart will sometimes make use of, to countenance itself in its abominations. Now, when a man with his sin is in this condition, that there is a secret liking of the sin prevalent in his heart... by neglecting to have it mortified and pardoned by the blood of Christ, this man's "wounds stink and are corrupt" – such a person without speedy deliverance will be at death's door.

C. Frequency of success in sin's seduction of the believer, in obtaining the consent of the will unto it, is another dangerous symptom. When the sin spoken of gets the consent of the will with some *delight*, it has success. Although men do not choose to be negligent or inattentive as to the dictates of the flesh, yet they choose the things that will make them so. Let not any man think that the evil of his heart is in any measure extenuated because he seems, for the most part, to be surprised at the consent which he gives in to; it is negligence of our duty in watching over our hearts that betrays us into being surprised.

D. When a man fights against his sin only with arguments that result from the punishment of it, this is a sign that sin hath taken great possession of the will, and that in the heart there is a superfluity of naughtiness. Such a man as opposes nothing to the seduction of sin and lust in his heart but fear of shame among men or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do the sin if there were no punishment attending it. Those who are genuinely Christ's have a deep-grounded abhorrency of sin *as sin*, and desire to oppose all the workings, seductions, strivings, fightings of lust in their hearts. Said Joseph, "How shall I do this great evil and sin against the Lord?" my good and gracious God. And Paul, "The love of Christ constrains us" And, "Having received these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor 7:1). But now if a man be so under the power of his lust that he has nothing but the law to oppose it, if he cannot fight against it with gospel weapons, it is most evident that sin has possessed itself of his will and affections to a great degree and conquest. Such a person has neglected the conduct of *renewing* grace, and is kept from ruin only by *restraining* grace.

E. When it is probable that there is a judiciary hardness in the heart against God's chastening, this is another dangerous symptom. God does sometimes leave even those of His own under the perplexing power at least of some lust or sin, to correct them for former sins, negligence, and folly. Thus was the complaint of God's people Israel, "Why hast thou hardened our heart from fearing Thee?" (Is 63:17). That this is His way of dealing with unregenerate men no man questions, but how shall a man know whether there be any thing of God's chastening hand in his being left to the disquietment of his distemper? *Ans.* Examine your heart and ways. What was the state and condition of your soul before you fell into the entanglements of that sin which now you so complain of? Hast thou been negligent in duties? Hast thou lived inordinately for yourself? Is there the guilt of any great sin lying upon you that you have not repented of? God may permit a *new sin* and a *new affliction* to bring an old sin to remembrance.

F. When your lust has already withstood particular dealings from God against it. This condition is described (Is 57:17), "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, and he went on turning away in the way of his heart." God had dealt with them because of their prevailing lust – by affliction and desertion – but they held out against Him. This is a sad condition, which nothing but *mere sovereign grace* (as God expresses it in the next verse) can relieve a man of. God oftentimes, in his providential dispensations, meets with a man, and speaks particularly to the evil of his heart, as He did to Joseph's brethren in their selling of him into Egypt. This makes the man reflect on his sin, and judge himself in particular for it. God makes it to be the voice of the danger, affliction, trouble, sickness that he is in or under. If his lust have taken such hold on him so as to force him to break these bands of the Lord, and cast these cords from him, that soul is in a sad condition. Unspeakable are the evils which attend such a frame of heart. And what infinite patience is this in God, that He does not cast off such a one, and swear in His wrath that he shall never enter into His rest! These and many other evidences are there of a lust that is dangerous, if not mortal. As our Savior said of the evil spirit, "This kind does not go out but by fasting and prayer," so say I of lusts of this kind: an ordinary course of mortification will not do it; extraordinary ways must be fixed on.

The things and evils mentioned above may befall a true believer, but let not anyone who finds these things in him conclude that he indeed is a true believer. A man may as well conclude that he is a believer because he is an adulterer. The seventh chapter of the Romans contains the description of a *regenerate man*. He that shall consider what is spoken of *his dark side*, of his unregenerate part, of the indwelling power and violence of sin remaining in him, and, because he finds such a likeness in himself, concludes that he is a regenerate man. Such a person may very well be deceived in this kind of reckoning. It is to argue thus: A wise man may be sick and wounded, yea, do some foolish things; therefore, every one who is sick and wounded and does foolish things is a wise man. If you will have evidences of your being believers, it must be from those things that make men believers. He that hath these things in himself may safely conclude, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one." But that any man is so, he must look for other evidences if he will have peace.

Chp 10 – The guilt, the danger, and the evil of sin

A SECOND direction is this: Get a clear and abiding sense upon your mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of that sin wherewith you are perplexed –

A. Consider the “guilt” of it. It is one of the deceits of a prevailing lust to extenuate its own guilt. "Is it not a little one?" "Though this be bad, yet it is not so bad as such and such an evil, or as bad as others have fallen into!" Innumerable are the ways 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. Was it possible that David laid long in the guilt of that abominable sin, because he had innumerable corrupt reasonings, hindering him from taking a clear view of its ugliness and guilt? This made the prophet that was sent for his awaking, in his dealings with him, to shut up all subterfuges and pretences by his parable, that so he might fall fully under a sense of the guilt of it. This is the proper issue of lust in the heart – it *darkens the mind* that it shall not judge aright of its guilt. Let this, then, be the first care of him that would mortify sin – to fix a right judgment of its guilt in his mind. To which end let these two considerations assist you –

1. Though the power of sin be weakened by “inherent grace” in them that have it, that sin shall not have dominion over them as it has over others, yet the guilt of sin that does yet abide and remain is aggravated and heightened by it – "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?" (Rom 6:1-2). How shall *we* do it, who have received grace from Christ to the contrary? Let this consideration abide in your mind – there is inconceivably more evil and guilt in the evil of your heart that does remain, than there would be in so much sin if you had no grace at all. Observe –

2. Just as God sees abundance of beauty and excellency in the desires of the heart of his servants, 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. Thus Christ, dealing with his decaying children, goes to the root of the matter with them, lays aside their profession: "You are quite another thing than you profess to be; and this makes you abominable." So, then, let these considerations lead you to a clear sense of the guilt of your indwelling lust, that there may be no room in your heart for extenuating or excusing thoughts, whereby sin insensibly will get strength and prevail.

B. Consider the “danger” of it (which is manifold) –

1. The danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness. This the apostle charges on the Hebrews: "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day... lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:12-13). Owen says it this way: "Take heed, consider your temptations, watch diligently; there is a treachery, a deceit in sin that tends to the hardening of your hearts from the fear of God." Every distemper and lust will strive to make some progress towards it. Thou that was tender, and used to melt under the word, under afflictions, wilt grow to be "sermon-proof and sickness-proof." Thou that didst tremble at the presence of God, and thoughts of death, when you had more assurance of His love than you now have, shall you not at all be concerned when you pass over duties, praying, hearing, reading, and your heart is not in the least affected? What will be the end of such a condition? Can a sadder thing befall you? Is it not enough to make any heart tremble, and be brought into that estate wherein you should have slight thoughts of sin? Slight

thoughts of grace, of mercy, of the blood of Christ, of the law, heaven, and hell? Take heed, this is what your lusts are working towards – the hardening of the heart, searing of the conscience, blinding of the mind, stupifying of the affections, and deceiving of the whole soul.

2. The danger of some great “temporal correction,” which the Scripture calls "vengeance," "judgment," and "punishment" (Ps 89:30-33) – “Though God should not utterly cast you off for this abomination that lies in your heart, yet He will visit you with the *rod*; though He pardon and forgive, He will take *vengeance* upon your inventions.” Remember David and all his troubles! Look at him flying into the wilderness, and consider the hand of God upon him. Is it nothing to you that God should kill His child in anger, ruin his estate in anger, break his bones in anger, suffer you to be a scandal and a reproach, and make you lie down in darkness, in anger? Is it nothing that He should punish, ruin, and undo others for your sake? I do not mean that God sends all these things *always* in His anger – God forbid! but this I say, that when He does so deal with you, and your conscience bears witness with Him what your provocations have been, you will find His dealings full of bitterness to your soul. If you do not fear these things, I fear you are under hardness.

3. The loss of peace and strength in all your days. To have peace with God, to have strength to walk before God, is the sum of the great promises of the covenant of grace. In these things is the life of our souls. Without them in some comfortable measure, to live is to die. What good will our lives do us if we see not the face of God sometimes in peace? If we have not some strength to walk with him? Of these things will an *unmortified lust* certainly deprive the souls of men. This case is very evident in the life of David – how often he complains that his bones were broken, his wounds grievous, his soul disquieted, on this account! Note other instances (Is 57:17) – "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and hid myself." What peace, I pray, is there to a soul while God hides Himself, or strength while He smites? (Hos 5:15) – "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face" – "I will leave them and hide My face, and what then will become of their peace and strength?" If ever you have enjoyed peace with God... if ever His terrors have made you afraid... if ever you have had strength to walk with Him, or have mourned in your praying, and been troubled because of your weakness, think of this danger that hangs over your head. It is perhaps but a little while and you shall see the face of God in peace no more. Perhaps by tomorrow you shall not be able to pray, read, hear, or perform any duties with the least cheerfulness, life, or vigor... and you might carry about within you broken bones, full of pain and terror, all the days of your life. Yea, perhaps God will shoot His arrows at you, and fill you with anguish and disquietness, with fears and perplexities... make you a terror and an astonishment to yourself and others... show you hell and wrath every moment... frighten and scare you with sad apprehensions of His hatred, so that your soul shall run in the night season, and your soul shall refuse comfort, so that you shall wish death rather than life. Consider this a little – though God should not utterly destroy you, yet He might cast you into this condition, wherein you shall have quick and living apprehensions of your destruction. May your heart know what is like to in such a state. Leave not this consideration until you have made your soul to tremble within you.

4. The danger of eternal destruction. First, beware, there is such a connection between a continuance in sin and *eternal destruction*. 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 (cf. Heb 3:12; 10:38) – This is the rule of God's proceeding: If any man "depart" from Him, and "draw back" through unbelief, "God's soul hath no

pleasure in him" – "His indignation shall pursue him to destruction: so evidently (Gal 6:8). Second, he who is *so entangled*, as above described, can have at that present time no clear prevailing evidence of his interest in the covenant, whereby he may be delivered from fear of destruction; so that destruction from the Lord may justly be a terror to him. Though there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), who shall have the comfort of this assertion? Who may assume it to himself? I do not say, that in such a condition a man ought to throw away the evidence of his personal interest in Christ; but I say, he cannot keep them, because the soul concludes that it deserves to be cast out of the presence of God. This is another consideration that ought to dwell upon such a soul, if it desires to be free from the entanglement of its lusts.

C. Consider the "present evils" of it. Some of the many evils that attend an *unmortified lust* are:

1. It grieves the holy and blessed Spirit, which is given to believers to dwell in them and abide with them. So the apostle (Eph 4:25-29), exhorting the Ephesian believers to abstain from many lusts and sins, gives this as the great motive of it (v. 30) – "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." "Grieve not that Spirit of God whereby you receive so many and so great benefits." 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 harboring His enemies, and those whom He is to destroy, in our hearts with Him. "He does not afflict willingly or grieve us" (Lam 3:33) – shall we daily grieve Him? Thus God is said to sometimes be "vexed," sometimes "grieved at his heart." Now, if there be anything of gracious ingenuity left in the soul, if it be not utterly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, this consideration will certainly affect it. Consider who and what thou art; who the Spirit is that is grieved, what He hath done for thee, what He comes to thy soul about, what He hath already done in thee; and be ashamed. Among those who walk with God, there is no greater motive and incentive unto universal holiness, and the preserving of their hearts and spirits in all purity and cleanness, than this – *the blessed Spirit, who hath undertaken to dwell in them, is continually considering what they give entertainment in their hearts unto, and rejoice when His temple is kept undefiled.* That was a high aggravation of the sin of Zimri, that he brought his adulteress into the congregation in the sight of Moses and the rest, who were weeping for the sins of the people (Num 25:6). Is it not a high aggravation of the countenancing of a lust, or suffering it to abide in the heart, when it is entertained under the peculiar eye and view of the Holy Spirit, taking care to preserve His tabernacle pure and holy?

2. 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 harboring of sin that He came to destroy wounds and grieves Him.

3. It will take away a man's usefulness in his generation. His works, his endeavors, his labors, seldom receive blessing from God. If he be a preacher, God commonly blows upon his ministry, that he shall labor in the fire, and not be honored with any success or doing any work for God – such may also be spoken of other conditions. The world is at this day full of poor withering professors. How few are there that walk in any beauty or glory! How barren and useless are they for the most part! Among the many reasons that may be assigned of this sad estate, it may justly be feared that many men harbor *spirit-devouring lusts* in their bosoms, that lie as worms at the root of their obedience, and corrode and weaken it day by day. All graces, all the ways and means whereby any

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

With regard to the habitual residence of lust in the soul, keep alive upon your heart the considerations of guilt, danger, and evil. Be much in the meditation of these things; cause your heart to dwell and abide upon them; engage your thoughts into these considerations; let them not go off nor wander from them until they begin to have a powerful influence upon your soul... until they make it tremble.

Chp 11 – Five directions

A THIRD direction is this – Load your conscience with the guilt of it. Not only consider that it hath a guilt, but load your conscience with the guilt of its actual eruptions and disturbances. Follow these particular directions –

A. Take God's method in it – Begin with generals, and then descend to particulars:

1. Charge your conscience with the guilt which appears in it from the holiness of the law.

Bring God's holy law into your conscience, lay your corruption to it, pray that you may be affected with it. Consider the holiness, spirituality, severity, and absoluteness of the law, and see how you stand before it. Reflect upon the terror of the Lord in the law, and how righteous it is that every one of your transgressions should receive a just recompense. Many people's consciences invent shifts and evasions to keep off the power of this consideration; that the condemning power of the law does not belong to them, that they have been set free from it – though they are not conformable to it, yet they are not so much troubled by it. But...

(a) Tell your conscience that it cannot manage any evidence suggesting that you are free from the condemning power of sin, while your *unmortified lust* lies in your heart. Ponder to the utmost what the law has to say. He who pleads in the most secret reserve of his heart that he is freed from the condemning power of the law, thereby secretly counseling himself in permitting some sin or lust, is not able, on gospel grounds, to manage such evidence unto any tolerable spiritual security; to reason that he is somehow freed from what he so pretends himself to be delivered.

(b) Whatever be the *issue*, the law has a commission from God to seize upon transgressors wherever it find them, and to bring them before His throne, where they are to plead their case. This is your case – the law has found you out, and before God it will be adjudged as such. If you can plead a pardon, well and good; if not, the law will do its work.

(c) This is the *proper work* of the law, to discover sin in the guilt of it, to awake and humble the soul for it; should you fail to deal with it, it is not because of your faith, but because of the hardness of your heart and the deceitfulness of sin. This is a door that too many professors have gone out unto apostasy. They maintain that they have been delivered by the law, and as such feel no longer compelled to measure their sin by it. Little by little this principle has proceeded to influence their practical understandings, and has turned the will and affections loose to all manner of abominations. I enjoin you to persuade your conscience to hearken diligently to what the law

speaks unto you about your lust and corruption. By the way, if your ears be open, it will speak with a voice that shall make you tremble. If ever you mortify your corruptions, you must tie up your conscience to the law, until it owns its guilt with a clear and thorough apprehension; that you may say with David, "My iniquity is ever before me" (Ps 51:3).

2. Bring your lust to the gospel, not for relief, but for farther conviction of its guilt; look on Him whom thou hast pierced, and be in bitterness. Say to your soul, "What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled upon? Is this the return I make to the Father for His *love*, to the Son for His *blood*, to the Holy Spirit for His *grace*? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the blessed Spirit hath chosen to dwell in? What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How shall I hold up my head with any boldness before Him? Do I reckon communion with Him of so little value, that for this vile lust's sake I have scarce left Him any room in my heart? How shall I escape if I neglect so great a salvation? In the meantime, what shall I say to the Lord? Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation – I have despised them all, and esteemed them as a thing of naught, that I might harbor a lust in my heart! Have I obtained a view of God's fatherly countenance, that I might behold His face and provoke Him to His face? Was my soul cleansed, that room might be made for new defilements? Shall I endeavor to disappoint the end for which Christ died? Shall I daily grieve the Spirit whereby I am sealed to the day of redemption? Entertain your conscience daily with this treaty. See if it can stand before this aggravation of its guilt. If these thoughts do not make it sink in some measure, I fear your case is dangerous.

B. Descend to particulars. When reflecting upon the general essence of the gospel, all the benefits of it are to be considered – redemption, justification, sanctification, glorification, and the like – in moving on to particulars, consider the loving ramifications of these things toward your own soul, as well as the aggravation of the guilt of your corruption –

1. Consider the infinite patience and forbearance of God towards you in particular. Consider what advantages He might have taken against you, to have made you a shame and a reproach in this world, and an object of wrath for ever; how you have dealt treacherously and falsely with Him from time to time, flattered Him with your lips, but broken all promises and engagements, and that by the means of that sin you art now in pursuit of; and yet He hath spared you from time to time. Why do you boldly put God to the test to see how long He will hold out? Will you yet sin against Him? Will you yet weary Him, and pain Him with your corruptions? Have you not often been ready to conclude yourself, that it is utterly impossible for Him to bear with you much longer? that He would cast you off? and cease being gracious to you? that you had exhausted all His forbearance? and that hell and wrath have been prepared for you? and yet with all these forebodings, He has returned with visitations of love. Therefore, will you yet abide in the provocation of the eyes of His glory?

2. How often have you been at the door of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and by the infinite rich grace of God you have been restored to communion with Him again? Hast thou not found grace *decaying*... delight in duties, prayer and meditation *vanishing*... inclinations to loose careless walking *thriving*... you who before were entangled, almost beyond recovery? Have you not found yourself delightfully engaging in such behaviors as God abhors? Thus, will you continue to venture more toward the brink of hardness?

3. All God's gracious dealings with you, in providential dispensations, deliverances, afflictions, mercies, and enjoyments – let your conscience reflect upon these things. Don't leave it not

until you are thoroughly affected with the guilt of your indwelling corruption, until you feel its wounds and lie in the dust before the Lord. While the conscience hath means of any kind to excuse or alleviate the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt its mortification... and unless this be done, all other endeavors are to no purpose.

A FOURTH direction is this – After having been affected with sin, develop a constant longing after deliverance from the power of it. Do not suffer your heart for one moment to be contented with your present frame and condition. Longing desires after any thing are of no value unless they incite and stir up the individual to a diligent use of means for the bringing about the thing aimed at. In spiritual things, longing, breathing, and panting after deliverance is a *grace* in itself, that has a mighty power to conform the soul into the likeness of the thing longed after. Hence the apostle, describing the repentance and godly sorrow of the Corinthians, reckons this as one eminent grace that was then set to working – "*vehement desire*" (2 Cor 7:11). In the case of the power of indwelling sin, how does Paul express himself? (Rom 7:24) – his heart breaks out into a passionate expression of *desire for deliverance*. If this be the frame of saints upon the general consideration of indwelling sin, then rest assured that unless you *long for deliverance* you shall not have it. Such longing will make the heart watchful for all opportunities of advantage against its enemy, and ready to close with any assistances that is afforded for its destruction. Strong desires are the very life of that "*praying always*" which is enjoined us in all conditions, and in none is more necessary than in this; they set faith and hope on work, and are the soul's moving after the Lord. Get your heart, then, into a panting and breathing frame – long, sigh, and cry out. Follow the example of David (cf. Ps 32; 51; 139).

A FIFTH direction is this – Consider whether or not the distemper with which you are perplexed is rooted in your *nature*, and cherished, stirred up, and heightened from your *constitution*. A proneness to some sins may doubtless lie in the natural temper and disposition of men. In this case consider:

A. This is not in the least a lessening of the guilt of your sin. Some will ascribe gross enormities to their temper and disposition, and whether others may not relieve themselves from the pressing guilt of their distempers by the same consideration, I know not. It is from the fall, from original depravation of our natures, that the incitement and nourishment of any sin abides in our natural temper. David reckons his being "shapen in iniquity and conception in sin" as an aggravation of his following sin, not a lessening of it. That you are peculiarly inclined unto any sinful distemper is but a peculiar breaking out of original lust in your nature, which should peculiarly abase and humble you.

B. That you have to "fix upon" on this account, in reference to your walking with God, is that so great an advantage is given to sin, and to Satan, by your temper and disposition, that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence, sin will assuredly prevail against your soul. Thousands have been on this account hurried headlong to hell, who otherwise, at least, might have gone at a more gentle, less provoking, less mischievous rate.

C. For the mortification of any distemper so rooted in the nature of a man, there is one *expedient* that the apostle Paul alludes to (1 Cor 9:27) – "I buffet my body, and bring it into subjection." The bringing of the body into subjection is an ordinance of God tending to the mortification of sin. This gives check unto the natural root of the distemper, and withers it by taking away its fatness of soil. Perhaps, because the Papists, men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ and the work of His Spirit, have laid the whole weight and stress of mortification in voluntary services and penances. The bringing of the body

into subjection by cutting short the natural appetite, by fasting, watching, and the like, is doubtless acceptable to God – these things should not be looked upon as intrinsically powerful virtues in and of themselves that can mortify sin; if this be the case then sin could be mortified without any help of the Spirit. These things are to be looked upon only as the ways whereby the Spirit may, and sometimes does, put forth strength for the accomplishing of His own work.

A SIXTH direction is this – Consider what *occasions*, what *advantages* your distemper has taken to exert and put forth itself, and watch against them all. This is one part of that duty which our blessed Savior recommends to His disciples under the name of *watching*: (Mk 13:37) – "I say unto you all, *watch*;" which in Luke (21:34) is, "Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged." Watch against all eruptions of your corruptions. This is the duty David himself professed to exercise: "I have kept myself from mine iniquity." He watched all the ways and workings of his iniquity, to prevent them, to rise up against them. This is that which we are called unto under the name of "considering our ways." Consider what ways, what companies, what opportunities, what studies, what businesses, what conditions, have at any time given, give advantage to your distempers, and set yourself heedfully against them. Men will do this with respect unto their bodily infirmities and distempers. The seasons, the diet, the air that have proved offensive shall be avoided. Are the things of the soul of less importance? Know that he that dares to dally with occasions of sin will dare to venture upon wickedness. If he will venture on temptations unto cruelty, he will be cruel. If you can convince him that he will venture on such occasions and temptations of them, he will have little ground left for his confidence.

A SEVENTH direction is this – Rise mightily against *the first actings* of your distemper, its first conceptions; suffer it not to get the least ground. Do not say, "Thus far it shall go, and no farther." If it have allowance for one step, it will take another. It is impossible to fix bounds to sin. It is like water in a channel – if it once break out, it will have its course. Therefore does James give that gradation and process of lust (Jam 1:14-15) that we may stop at the entrance. Do you find your corruption to begin to entangle your thoughts? Rise up with all your strength against it, with no less indignation that if it had fully accomplished what it aims at. Consider what an unclean thought would have – *murder* and *destruction* is at the end of hateful thoughts. Set yourself against it with no less vigor than if it had utterly debased you to wickedness. Without this course you will not prevail. As sin gets ground in the affections to delight in, it gets also upon the understanding to slight it.

Chp 12 – Thoughtfulness of the excellency of the majesty of God

An EIGHTH direction is this – Use and exercise yourself to such meditations as may serve to fill you at all times with *self-abasement* and thoughts of your own vileness. As...

A. Be much in thoughtfulness of the *excellency* of the majesty of God and your infinite, inconceivable distance from Him. Many thoughts of it cannot but fill you with a sense of your own vileness, which strikes deep at the root of any indwelling sin. When Job comes to a clear discovery of the greatness and the excellency of God, he is filled with self-abhorrence and is pressed to humiliation (Job 42:5-6). Hence were the thoughts of men of old, that when they had seen God... they should die. The Scripture abounds in this self-abasing consideration, comparing the men of the earth to "grasshoppers," to "vanity," the "dust of the balance," in respect of God. Be much in thoughts of this nature, to abase the pride of your heart, and to keep your soul humble within you. There is nothing that will render a greater indisposition to be imposed on by the deceits of sin than such a frame of heart. Think greatly of the greatness of God.

B. Think much of your *unacquaintedness with Him.* Though you know enough to keep yourself low and humble, yet how little do you know of Him! Such contemplation cast that wise man into that apprehension of himself (Prv 30:2-4) – "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established the ends of the earth? what is His name, and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell?" Labor with this to take down the pride of your heart. What do you know of God? How little a portion is it! How immense is He in His nature! Can you look without terror into the abyss of eternity? Man cannot bear the rays of His glorious being! I look on such considerations as being of great use in walking with God, and in drawing nigh to the throne of grace with filial boldness. Therefore, keep your heart in continual awe of the majesty of God. We speak much of God, can talk of Him, His ways, His works, His counsels, all the day long – the truth is, we know very little of Him. Our thoughts, our meditations, our expressions of Him are low, the vast majority of them completely unworthy of His glory, none of them reaching His perfections.

The apostle Paul writes, "We see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor 13:12). Though a telescope helps us see things afar off... yet the fact is all that we do see by or through this glass is but "a riddle," in darkness and obscurity. And speaking of himself, Paul who surely was much more clear-sighted than any now living, he tells us that he saw but "*in part.*" He saw but the back parts of heavenly things, (v. 12), and compares all the knowledge he had attained of God to that he had of things when he was a child (v. 11). We know what weak, feeble, uncertain notions and apprehensions children have of things of any abstruse consideration; how when they grow up with any improvements of parts and abilities, those conceptions vanish, and they are ashamed of them. It is the commendation of a child to love, honor, believe, and obey his father; but for his science and notions, his father knows his childishness and folly. Notwithstanding all our confidence of high attainments, all our notions of God are but childish in respect to His infinite perfections. We may love, honor, believe, and obey our Father; and therewith He accepts our childish thoughts, for they are but childish. We see but His back parts; we know but very little of Him. Hence is that promise wherewith we are so often comforted in our distress – "We shall see Him as He is;" we shall see Him "face to face;" and "know as we are known; and comprehend that for which we are comprehended" (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2) – all concluding that here we see but His back parts, not as He is, but a dark, obscure representation; not the perfection of His glory. Consider Him who is to be known and the way whereby we know Him –

1. We know so little of God, because it is God who is to be known – our progress consists more in knowing what He is not, than what He is. Thus is he described to be eternal, immortal, infinite – that is, He is not, as we are, mortal, finite, and limited. Hence is that glorious description of Him (1 Tim 6:16) – "Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see." His light is such as no creature can approach unto. He is not seen, not because He cannot be seen, but because we cannot bear the sight of Him. The light of God, in whom is no darkness, forbids all access to Him by any creature whatever. We who cannot behold the *sun* in its glory are too weak to bear the beams of infinite brightness of "*the Son.*" On this consideration, as was said, the wise man professeth himself to be "a very beast, and not to have the understanding of a man" (Prv 30:2) – that is, he knew nothing in comparison of God; so that he seemed to have lost all his understanding when once he came to the consideration of Him, His work, and His ways. In this consideration let our souls descend to some particulars –

(a) For the *being* of God – we are so far from a knowledge of it... so as to be able to instruct one another by words to frame any conceptions in our mind... is to make an idol to ourselves, and so to worship a god of our own making, and not the God that made us. The utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God is, that we can have no thoughts of it. Our knowledge of a being is but low when it mounts no higher than to know that we know it not.

(b) There be *some things* of God which He Himself hath taught us to speak of, and to regulate our expressions of them; but when we have so done, we see not the things themselves; we know them not. To *believe* and *admire* is all that we attain to. We profess, as we are taught, that God is infinite, omnipotent, eternal; and we know what notions there are about omnipresence, immensity, infiniteness, and eternity. We have, I say, words and notions *about* these things; but as to the things *themselves* what do we know? what do we comprehend of them? Can the mind of man do any more but swallow itself up in an infinite abyss, which is as nothing; give itself up to what it cannot conceive, much less express? Is not our understanding "brutish" in the contemplation of such things, and is as if it were not? Yea, the perfection of our understanding is, not to understand, and to rest there. They are but the back parts of eternity and infiniteness that we have a glimpse of. What shall I say of the Trinity, or the subsistence of distinct persons in the same individual essence – a mystery by many denied, because by none understood. That infinite and inconceivable distance that is between Him and us keeps us in the dark as to any sight of His face or clear apprehension of His perfections. We know Him rather by what He does than by what He is – by His doing us good than by His essential goodness; and how little a portion of Him, as Job speaks, is hereby discovered!

2. We know little of God, because it is *faith* alone whereby here we know Him. I shall not now discourse about the remaining impressions on the hearts of all men by nature that there is a God from the works of his creation and providence, which they see and behold. Almost the only acquaintance we have with God, and His dispensations of Himself, is by *faith* – "He that cometh to God must believe that is He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6). Our knowledge of Him and His rewarding is simply *believing* – "We walk by faith, and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Faith is all the argument we have of "things not seen" (Heb 11:1). I might here insist upon the nature of it, but the back parts of what we know, we only know by faith only. As to its rise, it is built purely upon the testimony of Him whom we have not seen: as the apostle speaks, "How can you love Him whom you have not seen?" Faith receives all upon *His* testimony. Hence our faith, as was formerly observed, is called a "seeing darkly, as through a glass." All that we know this way (and all that we know of God we know this way) is but low, and dark, and obscure. Though no man has seen God at any time, it is true "the only-begotten Son has revealed Him" (Jn 1:18); and "the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him" (1 Jn 5:20). And "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into our hearts, to give us the knowledge of His glory in the face of His Son" (v. 6) – and "though we were darkness yet we are now light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8; 2 Cor 3:18). To which I answer –

(a) The truth is, we all of know *enough* of Him to love Him more than we do, to delight in Him and serve Him, believe Him, obey Him, put our trust in Him, above all that we have hitherto attained. Our darkness and weakness is no plea for our negligence and disobedience. God's end in giving us any knowledge of Himself here is that we may "*glorify Him as God*" – that is, love Him, serve Him, believe and obey Him, give Him all the honor and glory that is due from poor

sinful creatures to a sin-pardoning God and Creator. We must all acknowledge that we were never thoroughly transformed into the image of that knowledge which we have had. And had we used our talents well, we might have been trusted with more.

(b) Comparatively, that knowledge which we have of God by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel is exceedingly eminent and glorious. It is so in comparison of any knowledge of God that might otherwise be attained, or was delivered in the law under the Old Testament, which had but the shadow of good things, not the express image of them; this the apostle Paul pursues at large (cf. 2 Cor 3) – Christ hath now in these last days revealed the Father from His own bosom, declared His name, made known His mind, will, and counsel in a far more clear, eminent, distinct manner than He did formerly. The clear, perspicuous delivery and declaration of God and His will in the gospel is expressly exalted in comparison of any other way of revelation of Himself.

(c) The difference between believers and unbelievers as to knowledge is not much in the matter of their knowledge as in the manner of knowing. Some unbelievers may know more and be able to say more of God, His perfections, and His will, than many believers; but they know nothing as they ought, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually and savingly, nothing with a holy, heavenly light. The excellency of a believer is, not that he hath a large apprehension of things, but that what he does apprehend, which perhaps may be very little, he sees it in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light; and this is that which gives us communion with God, and not prying thoughts or curious-raised notions.

(d) Jesus Christ by His word and Spirit reveals to the hearts of all who are His, God as a Father, as a God in covenant, as a rewarder, every way sufficiently to teach us to obey Him here, and to lead us to His bosom... but notwithstanding all this, it is but a *little portion* we know of Him; we see but His back parts. The intendment of all gospel revelation is, not to *unveil God's essential glory* (to see Him as he is), but merely to declare so much of Him (as He knows sufficient) to be a bottom of our faith, love, obedience, and coming to Him. Though the way of revelation in the gospel be clear and evident, yet we know little of the things themselves that are revealed.

Let us, then, revive the use and intendment of this consideration: Will not a due apprehension of this inconceivable greatness of God, and that infinite distance wherein we stand from Him, fill the soul with a holy and awful fear of Him, so as to keep it in a frame unsuited to the thriving or flourishing of any lust? Let the soul continually desire reverential thoughts of God's greatness and omnipresence, and it will be much upon its watch as to any undue behaviors. Consider Him with whom you have to do – even "our God is a consuming fire;" and in your greatest abashments at His presence, know that your very nature is too narrow to bear apprehensions suitable to His essential glory.

Chapter 13 – Precautions against false peace

A NINTH direction is this – 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 that you not speak peace to yourself before God speaks it; but hearken what He says to your soul.* This is our next direction, without the observation whereof the heart will be exceedingly exposed to the deceitfulness of sin. This is a business of great importance. It is a sad thing for a man to deceive his own soul. All the warn-

ings God gives us, in tenderness to our souls, to try and examine ourselves, do tend to the preventing of this great evil of speaking peace groundlessly to ourselves; which is upon the issue to bless ourselves, in an opposition to God. It is not my business to insist upon the danger of it, but to help believers to prevent it, and to let them know when they do so. To manage this direction aright observe –

A. That as it is the great prerogative and sovereignty of God to give grace to whom He pleases – "He has 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 pleases, and in what degree he pleases, even amongst them on whom He hath bestowed grace. He is the "*God of all consolation,*" in a special manner in His dealing with believers; that is, of the good things that He keeps locked up in His family, and gives out of it to all His children at His pleasure. This the Lord insists on (Is 57:16-18). It is the case under consideration that is there insisted on. When God says He will heal their breaches and disconsolations, He assumes this privilege to Himself in a special manner: "I create it" (v. 19); "even in respect of these poor wounded creatures I create it, and according to My sovereignty make it out as I please."

B. As God creates it for whom He pleases, so it is the prerogative of Christ to speak it home to the conscience. Speaking to the church of Laodicea, who had healed her wounds falsely, and spoke peace to herself when she ought not, He takes to Himself that title, "I am the Amen and the faithful Witness" (Rev 3:14). He bears testimony concerning our condition as it is indeed. We may possibly mistake, and trouble ourselves in vain, or flatter ourselves upon false grounds, but He is the "Amen, the faithful Witness;" and what He speaks of our state and condition, that is it indeed (Is 11:3) – He is said not to "judge by what His eyes see" – not according to any outward appearance, or any thing that may be subject to a mistake, as we are apt to do; but He shall judge and determine every cause as it is indeed. Regarding these two observations, let me give some rules whereby men may know whether God speaks peace to them, or whether they speak peace to themselves only –

1. Men often 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 be *healed by God*. When men do truly "look upon Christ whom they have pierced," without which there is no healing or peace, they will "mourn" (Zech 12:10); they will mourn for Him and detest the sin that pierced Him. When we go to Christ for healing, faith eyes Him peculiarly as one pierced. When one goes to Christ for healing, His stripes are to be eyed – in love, kindness, mystery, and design of the cross; and when we look for peace, His chastisements must be in our eye. When Job comes up to a thorough healing, he cries, "Now I abhor myself" (Job 42:6); and until he did so, he had no abiding peace. Let a man make what application he will for healing and peace, but let him do it to the true Physician, let him do it the right way, let him quiet his heart in the promises of the covenant; yet, when peace is spoken, if it be not attended with the detestation and abhorrency of that sin which was the wound and caused the disquietment, *this is no peace of God's creating, but of our own purchasing*. It is but a skinning over the wound, while the core lies untouched, which will putrefy, and corrupt, and corrode, until it break out again with noisomeness, vexation, and danger – a

thorough detestation of the evil itself must abide not upon you. The absence of such a detestation is a deceit that lies at the root of the peace of many professors... and their whole peace is quickly discovered to be weak and rotten, scarce abiding any longer than the words of begging it are in their mouths.

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. Let me explain – 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. He has sufficient light 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 (a medicated dressing) as large 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 judgment," but the mere actings of the intelligent, *rational soul*. The believer sometimes merely acts upon the principle of conviction and illumination, but the Spirit does not necessarily breathe upon these waters. In the perturbation of his mind, the believer finds out that promise (Is 55:7) – "The Lord will have mercy, and our God will abundantly pardon" – yea, He will multiply or add to pardon, He will do it again and again; or that in Hosea (Hos 14:4) – "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." This the man considers, and thereupon concludes peace to himself; whether the Spirit of God make the application or not. He does not hearken whether God the Lord speaks peace. He does not wait upon God, who perhaps still hides His face, and sees the poor creature stealing peace and running away with it, knowing that the time will come when He will deal with him again, and call him to a new reckoning; when he shall see that it is in vain to go one step where God does not take him by the hand. I see here, indeed, sundry other questions upon this arising and interposing themselves. Obviously I cannot apply myself to them all. Suffice it to say the following –

(a) If any of you are out of the way upon this account, God will speedily let you know it...

He will not let you always err... you shall quickly know your wound is not healed... the peace you thus get and obtain will not abide. While the mind is overpowered by its own convictions, there is no hold for disquietments to fix upon. Stay a little, and all these reasonings will grow cold and vanish before the face of the first temptation that arises.

(b) 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 sometimes comes in upon the soul instantly, in a moment, as it were, wounding and healing it – as I am persuaded it was in the case of David, when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment; but ordinarily, in such a case, God calls for *waiting and laboring*, attending as the eye of a servant upon his master. Says the prophet Isaiah (8:17), "I will wait upon the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob." 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 them-

selves, do commonly make haste; they will not tarry; they do not hearken what God speaks, but on they will go to be healed.

(c) Such a course, thought it may quiet the conscience and the mind for a moment, yet it does not *sweeten* the heart with rest, peace and gracious contentment. When God speaks, there is not only truth in His words, that may answer the conviction of our understandings, but they also do good – they bring that which is sweet, and good, and desirable to the will and affections; and by them the "soul returns unto its rest" (Ps 116:7).

(d) 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; no, it is the readiest course in the world to bring a soul into a trade of backsliding. If, upon the plastering (medicating) of yourself, you find yourself rather animated to the battle again than utterly being weaned from it, it is too probably that you have been at work with your own soul, and that Jesus Christ and His Spirit were not there. Yea, and oftentimes nature having done its work, will be quiet for a few days and come back for its reward; having been active in the work of healing, it will be ready to reason for a new wounding. In God's speaking peace there comes along so much sweetness, and such a discovery of His love, as is a strong obligation on the soul no more to deal perversely.

C. We speak peace to ourselves when we do it *slightly*. This the prophet Jeremiah complains of in some teachers (Jer 6:14) – "They have healed the wound of My people slightly." And it is so with some persons: they make the healing of their wounds a slight work – a shallow work – a glance of faith to the promises does it, and the matter is ended. The apostle tells us that "the word did not profit" some, because "it was not well tempered" and mingled with faith. It is not a mere look to the word of mercy in the promise, but it must be mingled with faith until it is incorporated into the very nature of it; and then, indeed, it doth good unto the soul. If you have had a wound upon your conscience, which was attended with weakness and disquietness, which now you are freed of, how did it happen? "I looked to the promises of pardon and healing, and so found peace." Yea, but perhaps you have made too much haste, you have done it overtly, you have not fed upon the promise so as to mix it with faith, to have got all the virtue of it diffused into your soul; because you have simply done it slightly. You will find your wound, ere it be long, breaking out again; and you shall know that you are not cured.

D. 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. Let me explain my meaning: A man hath neglected a duty again and again, perhaps, when in all righteousness it was due from him; his conscience is perplexed, his soul wounded, he hath no quiet in his bones by reason of his sin; he applies himself for healing, and finds peace. Yet, in the meantime, perhaps, worldliness, or pride, or some other folly, wherewith the Spirit of God is exceedingly grieved, may lie in the bosom of that man, and they neither disturb him nor he them. Let not that man think that any of his peace is from God. 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."

E. When men speak peace to their own consciences, it is seldom that God speaks humiliation to their souls. God's peace is a humbling peace, a melting peace, as it was in the case of David – never such deep humiliation as when Nathan brought him the tidings of his pardon. 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?" In general, when God speaks it – He will sooner or later. As stated before, He may do it in the very instant of the sin itself... sometimes He will make us wait longer – but when He speaks, be it sooner or later, be it when we are sinning or repenting, be the condition of our souls what they are, if God speak, *He must be received*. There is nothing in our communion with God, that troubles the Lord more than our *unbelieving fears*, that keep us off from receiving that strong consolation which He is so willing to give to us. Therefore, when God speaks it, we must receive it – *that is true*. But how shall we know *when He speaks?*"

There is, if I may so say, a secret instinct in faith, whereby it knows the voice of Christ when He indeed speaks; as the babe leaped in the womb when the blessed Virgin came to Elisabeth, so faith leaps in the heart when Christ indeed draws nigh to it. "My sheep know My voice," said Jesus (Jn 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 does speak, He speaks as never man spake; He speaks with power, and one way or another will make your "hearts burn within you," as He did to the disciples (Lk 24). He does it by the indwelling presence of His Spirit in your hearts. He that hath his senses exercised to discern good or evil, being increased in judgment 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. 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. Let me conclude with this thought: Without the observation of it, sin will have great advantages towards the hardening of the heart.

Chp 14 – The necessity of faith on Christ

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, what I have hitherto aimed at. Directions that are peculiar to the work itself are very few. They are these –

A. Set faith at work on Christ for the *killing* of your sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror! May you, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet. But you will say, "How shall faith act itself on Christ for this end and purpose?" I say, sundry ways –

1. By faith fill your soul with a due consideration of that *provision* which is laid up in Jesus Christ for this end and purpose, that *all* your lusts may be mortified. By faith ponder on this, that though you are no way able in or by yourself to get the conquest over any such distemper, though you are even weary of contending, and are utterly ready to faint, yet that there is enough in Jesus Christ to yield you relief (Phil 4:13). It staid the prodigal, when he was ready to faint, that yet there was bread enough in his father's house; though he was at a distance from it, yet it relieved him, and staid him, that there it was! In your greatest distress and anguish, consider that fullness of grace,

(those treasures of strength, might, and help) that is laid up in Him for our support (Jn 1:16; Col. 1:19). Let these things come into and abide in your mind. Consider that He is "exalted and made a Prince and a Savior to give repentance unto Israel" (Acts 5:31); and if not to give repentance, to give mortification, without which the other is not, nor can be. Christ tells us that we obtain purging grace by *abiding in Him* (Jn 15:3). To have faith upon the fullness that is in Christ for our supply is an eminent way of abiding in Christ; our abode is by faith (Rom 11:19-20). Let your soul, then, be exercised by faith with such thoughts and apprehensions as these: "I am a poor, weak creature; unstable as water, I cannot excel. This corruption is too hard for me, and is at the very door of ruining my soul; and what to do I know not. My soul is become as parched ground, and a habitation of dragons. I have made promises and broken them; vows and engagements have been as a thing of naught. Many persuasions have I had that I had got the victory and should be delivered, but I am deceived; so that I plainly see, that without some eminent succor and assistance, I am lost, and shall be prevailed on to an utter relinquishment of God. But yet, though this be my state and condition, let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and the feeble knees be strengthened. 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 dry soul and make me more than a conqueror! "Why sayest thou, O my soul, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment 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? His understanding is inscrutable. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint!" (Is 40:27-31). He can make the "dry, parched ground of my soul to become a pool, and my thirsty, barren heart as springs of water;" yea, He can make this "habitation of dragons," this heart, so full of abominable lusts and fiery temptations, to be a place for "grass and fruit to Himself" (Is 35:7). So God staid Paul, under his temptation, with the consideration of the sufficiency of His grace: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor 12:9). Though he were not immediately so far made partaker of it as to be freed from his temptation, yet the sufficiency of it in God, for that end and purpose, was enough to stay his spirit. I say, then, by faith, be much in the consideration of that supply and the fullness of it that is in Jesus Christ, and how He can at any time give you strength and deliverance. The efficacy of this consideration will be found only in the practice.

2. Raise up your 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 you, while you are under your trouble and perplexity, yet it shall surely come in the appointed time of the Lord Jesus; which is the best season. If, then, you can raise up your heart to a settled expectation of relief from Jesus Christ; if your eyes are towards Him "as the eyes of a servant to the hand of his master when he expects to receive somewhat from him," your soul shall be satisfied, He will assuredly deliver you; He will slay the lust, and your latter end shall be peace. Only look for it at *His hand*; expect when and how He will do it. "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." But, you say, "What ground have I to build such an expectation upon, so that I may expect not to be deceived?" As Thou hast necessity to put you on this course, you must be relieved and saved this way or none. To whom will you go? So there are in the Lord Jesus innumerable things to encourage and engage you to this expectation.

This is the work of faith and of believers only. "Without Me, you can do nothing," says Christ (Jn 15:5). Mortification of any sin must be by a supply of grace. Of ourselves we cannot do it. Now, "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell" (Col 1:19); that "of his fullness we might receive grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). He is the head from whence the new man must have influences of life and strength, or it will decay every day. If we are "strengthened with might in the inner man," it is by "Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith" (Eph 3:16-17). That this work is not to be done without the Spirit I have also shown before. Whence, then, do we expect the Spirit? from whom do we look for Him? who hath promised Him to us? who hath procured Him for us? Ought not all our expectations to this purpose be on Christ alone? Let this, then, be fixed upon your heart, that *if you have not found relief from Him, you shall never have any*. All ways, endeavors, contendings, that are not animated by this expectation of relief from Christ and Him only are to no purpose, will do you no good; yea, if they are any thing but supportments of your heart in this expectation, or means appointed by oneself for the receiving help from Him, they are in vain. Now, to further engage you to this expectation –

(a) Consider His *mercifulness*, tenderness, and kindness, as He is our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Assuredly He pities you in your distress; says He, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Is 66:13). He hath the tenderness of a mother to a sucking child (Heb 2:17-18) – "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." How is the ability of Christ upon the account of His suffering proposed to us? "In that He Himself hath suffered and was tempted, He is able." Did the sufferings and temptations of Christ add to His ability and power? No. He is able, having suffered and been tempted, to break through all dissuasions to the contrary, to relieve poor tempted souls – "*He is able to help.*" Because of His own experience, He can now be moved to help, having been like tempted as we (Heb 4:15-16) – "For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with *the feeling of our infirmities*; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Therefore, let us entertain expectations of relief from Christ, which the apostle there calls "grace for seasonable help." "If ever," says the soul, "help were seasonable, it would be so to me in my present condition; this is that which I long for – if help does not come I shall die and be lost for ever; and iniquity will have prevailed against me." Says the apostle, "*Expect this help, this relief, this grace from Christ.*" Yea, but on what account? Our sympathizing high priest (v. 15) from whom "we may receive it" (v. 16) – suitable and seasonable help will come in. I shall freely say, this one thing of establishing the soul by faith in expectation of relief from Jesus Christ, on the account of *His mercifulness* as our high priest, will be more available to the ruin of your lust and distemper, and have a better and speedier issue, than all the rigidest means of self-maceration that ever any of the sons of men engaged themselves in. Yea, let me add, that never did any soul perish by the power of any lust, sin, or corruption, who could raise his soul by faith to an expectation of relief from Jesus Christ.

(b) Consider the *faithfulness* of Him who hath promised; which may raise you up and confirm you 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. God tells us that His covenant with us is like the "ordinances" of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, which have their certain courses (Jer 31:36). Thus David said

that he watched for relief from God "*as one watched for the morning*" – a thing that will certainly come in its appointed season. So will be your relief from Christ. It will come in its season, as the dew and rain upon the parched ground; for faithful is He who hath promised. Particular promises to this purpose are innumerable; with some of them, that peculiarly seem to suit our condition; therefore let the soul be always assured. There are two eminent advantages which always attend this expectation of succor from Jesus Christ –

(i) 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 He shall assist us accordingly. This the Psalmist gives us as an approved maxim, "*Thou, Lord, never forsakest them that put their trust in thee.*" When the heart is once won to rest in God, to repose himself on Him, He most assuredly will satisfy it. He will never be as water that fails. He never said at any time to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye My face in vain." If Christ be chosen for the foundation of our supply, He will not fail us.

(ii) It engages the heart to attend diligently to all the ways and means whereby Christ desires to communicate Himself to the soul. 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 vigor, 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. On this account I reduce all particular actings, by prayer, meditation, and the like, to this head; and so shall not farther insist on them, when they are grounded on this bottom and spring from this root. They are of singular use to this purpose, and not else.

Now, on this direction for the mortification of a prevailing distemper you may have a thousand "probatum est's" (Latin for "it has been tried or proved"). Who has walked with God under this temptation, and has not found the use and success of mortification? Only a few particulars relating thereunto should be mentioned –

First, exercise faith peculiarly in the death, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, in the crucified Christ. Mortification of sin is peculiarly made possible through the death of Christ, and shall assuredly be accomplished by it. *He died to destroy the works of the devil* – "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works" (Tit 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. "He gave Himself for the church, that He might sanctify and cleanse it; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27). And this, by virtue of His death shall be accomplished. Hence our washing, purging, and cleansing is everywhere ascribed to His blood (1 Jn 1:8; Heb 1:3; Rev 1:5). His blood being sprinkled on us, "purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14). It is this we aim at and pursue: that our consciences may be *purged from dead works*, that they may be rooted out, destroyed, and have no more place in us. And this shall certainly be brought about by the

death of Christ. Thus the apostle states (Rom. 6:2) – "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Paul presses sundry considerations in the ensuing verses. This must not be (Rom 6:3) – "know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" We have in baptism an evidence of our implantation into Christ – we are baptized into Him. The explication of our being baptized into the death of Christ, the apostle gives us in the following verses (Rom 6:4, 6) – "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom 6:6). We are crucified with Him *meritoriously*, in that He procured the Spirit for us to mortify sin... and *efficiently*, in that from His death virtue comes forth for our crucifying. Christ by His death destroyed the works of the devil... procured the Spirit for us... and killed sin as to its reign in us, that it shall not obtain dominion over us.

Second, we are to then exercise faith in the death of Christ under the following notion: with an expectation of *power*. 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 – then bring Him (in that condition) into your heart by faith, and *apply His blood* that was shed for your corruptions. Do this *daily*. This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is effected, carried on, and accomplished by the power of the *Holy Spirit* —

- a. He alone clearly and fully convinces the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the corruption, lust, or sin to be mortified. Without this conviction there will be no thorough work made. An unbelieving heart (as we all have in part) will shift with any consideration, until it be overpowered by clear and evident convictions. This is the proper work of the Spirit – "He convinces of sin" (Jn 16:8), and He alone can do that. If men's rational considerations, with the preaching of the letter, were able to fully convince them of sin, we should see more convictions than we do. There comes by the preaching of the word an apprehension upon the understandings of men that they are sinners, that such and such things are sins, that themselves are guilty of them; but this light is not powerful enough, nor does it lay hold on the practical principles of the soul, so as to fully conform the mind and will unto them. Only the Holy Spirit can do this work, and this is the first thing that He does in order to mortify any lust – it convinces the soul of all the evil of it, cuts off all its pleas, discovers all its deceits, stops all its evasions, answers its pretences, and makes the soul own its abominations. Unless this be done all that follows is in vain.
- b. 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).
- c. 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).
- d. The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power; for by the Spirit are we baptized into the death of Christ.
- e. The Spirit is the author and finisher of our sanctification; He gives new supplies and influences of grace for holiness and sanctification, when the contrary principle is weakened and abated (Eph 3:16-18).
- f. In all the soul's addresses to God in this condition, it hath supportment from the Spirit. Whence is the power, life, and vigor of prayer? whence is its efficacy to prevail with God? Is it not from the Spirit?

He is the "Spirit of supplications" promised to them "who look on Him whom they have pierced" (Zech 12:10), enabling them "to pray with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26). This is confessed to be the great medium or way of faith's prevailing with God. Thus Paul dealt with his temptation (whatever it was) – "I pleaded the Lord that it might depart from me."