

## EPILOGUE

(Concluding Remarks)

**Eugene Peterson has rightly stated, “A quest is not a conclusion.”** The quest or pursuit of holiness and spirituality is a process – a work in progress – not an instantaneous experience. Furthermore, it is not aimless wandering, but a distinct objective to be pursued. And every step of assent toward God arrives at a place where “joy” is experienced – not only is there more to be enjoyed the more progress that is made, there is an increased ability to enjoy it. “Best of all,” writes Peterson, “we don’t have to wait until we get to the end of the road before we enjoy what is at the end of the road” (Peterson, p.192). The noted nineteenth century tractarian and vicar of St. Mary’s University Church in Oxford, England, **John Henry Newman**, writes —

*May it be our blessedness, as years go on, to add one grace to another, and advance upward, step by step, neither neglecting the lower after attaining the higher, nor aiming at the higher before attaining the lower. The first grace is faith, the last is love; first comes zeal, afterwards comes lovingkindness; first comes humiliation, then comes peace; first comes diligence, then comes resignation. May we learn to mature all [of the] graces within us; fearing and trembling, watching and repenting, because Christ is coming.* (Newman, p. 211)

**The 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian “John Owen” has long been recognized by evangelicals** as one of the greatest English-speaking theologians in the history of the Church. Owen’s thinking touched both the depths of sin and the heights of grace. Many of his readers have come away from reading him on such themes as temptation and indwelling sin, feeling that Owen knew them through and through. The truth is, through a constant and intensive study of both Scripture and the human heart, Owen had come to know himself and God like few before him. His theology is marked by prodigious learning, profound thought and acute analysis of the human heart. It was out of the riches of his studies that he preached and wrote on the loftiest themes of Christian theology. During his lifetime he published over sixty titles of varying lengths, and a dozen more appeared posthumously. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, W. H. Goold edited a twenty-four volume edition of all Owen’s writings titled *Works*. In his writings *Works XII* (p. 52), Owens writes —

*What am I the better if I can dispute that Christ is God, but have no sense of sweetness in my heart from hence that He is a God in covenant with my soul? What will it avail me to evince [by arguments], that He hath made satisfaction for sin, if through my unbelief, the wrath of God abideth on me, and I have no experience of my own being made the righteousness of Him... [with] my sins imputed to Him and His righteousness imputed to me?... It is the power of truth in the heart alone that will make us cleave unto [God’s quickening work of grace within us] in an hour of temptation.* (Ferguson, p. 281).

**John Owen, in a challenge to “personal godliness”** says the directions for the actual work of mortification are only two – the first is to live wholly and solely in your trust of Christ, and the second is to seek the Holy Spirit who alone mortifies sin. *Regarding trust in the sufficiency of Christ*, he writes: “Avoid the entanglements of lust by filling your soul with the realization of all the provisions avail-

able in Christ Jesus. [Without knowing them you will flounder.] Moreover, ponder that you are in no way able, in and by yourself, to contend against your sinful condition. When you are weary of the struggle and ready to give up, [know this] there is always enough in Jesus Christ to give you relief” (Phil 4:13). Let your soul declare: “The corruption of the flesh is too hard for me to cope with by myself; I have been deceived too many times to believe that I have finally obtained victory over sin... yet I know that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth... giveth power to the faith, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength (Is 40:27-29); and He assures us that His grace is sufficient” (2 Cor 12:9 – Owen, pp. 189-190). The author of Hebrews writes: “Since Christ Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted... We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 2:18; 4:15-16).

**Regarding seeking the Holy Spirit for the mortification of sin,** it is the Holy Spirit who convinces the heart of the evil and guilt that needs to be mortified (Jn 16:8). Though we have sufficient light in our souls to behold our sinfulness, we do not have the wherewithal “in ourselves” to mortify the sin. Unless we are convinced of the unique power of the Holy Spirit, we shall go on living in futility about sin. Owen reminds us that the Holy Spirit alone reveals to us the fullness of Christ for our relief, and brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power (Rom 6:6). The Spirit is the author and finisher of our sanctification – He provides the resources and new influences of grace for holiness and sanctification; He does this when the contrary principle of the flesh is weakened (Eph 3:16-21). The Holy Spirit is the conveyor of faith that prevails with God (Rom 8:26 – Owens, pp. 192-193)

**In this book we have examined the essence of what it means to be “spiritually transformed”...** the work of Christ that makes it possible... the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the process... and the experience of the believer and the need for his participative cooperation. This study was written to provide the believer with an understanding of the ups and downs of the Christian experience, and the path wherein to walk with God in holiness and sanctification. The subjects discussed are —

- The process whereby one truly becomes a genuine child of God
- The process whereby the believer’s life becomes conformed to the image of Christ
- The reason the believer struggles in his pursuit of holiness and spirituality
- The believer’s predisposition to sinning and living by the law
- The believer’s struggle with guilt, discouragement and spiritual depression
- The believer’s struggle with performance-based living
- The believer’s struggle with walking in the Spirit
- The believer’s struggle with trusting God during difficult times
- The reason the believer’s feelings often run counter to the will of God
- The believer’s struggle to believe that God really loves him
- The reason the believer’s peace and joy seem to grow wings so easily and fly away
- The reason the believer’s lack of perfection is so discouraging and self-defeating
- The believer’s obsession with his sins and his poor performance
- The believer’s struggle to overcome temptation
- The believer’s struggle to be the person God wants him to be
- The reason God seems to withdraw Himself at times from the believer’s life
- The reason the will of God so often seems contrary to our spirits
- The reason it is so difficult for the believer to abandon “his will” for “God’s will”

- The reason the believer’s “new nature” seems so much weaker than his “old nature”
- The steps whereby the believer can maximize his growth in holiness and sanctification
- The steps whereby the believer can experience the fullness of God’s grace in his life
- The steps whereby the believer can experience the joy of intimate fellowship with God

**These are significant issues in every believer’s life.** They are issues we all wrestle with. Obviously, the journey of becoming like Christ is no picnic in the park or day at the beach – it is a challenging, painful pilgrimage through a wilderness of death, war and pestilence. Since when are these pleasant experiences? True, God does provide us with spiritual manna daily, just as He provided the children of Israel with a daily supply of physical manna some 3400 years ago in the Sinai, and there are those wonderful moments of joy, peace and rest... yet the enemy of our soul is always just around the corner waiting to wrack havoc upon us, and God’s supreme work of “*soul transformation*” is once again front and center in our lives (Is 48:10; Rom 5:3-4; Heb 12:5-11; 1 Pet 5:8-11). It is precisely the painful issue of soul transformation that prompts so many believers – and regrettably, many pastors – to opt for a “*more positive narrative*” about the Christian life: one that only focuses on the positives; one that promises victory at every turn; name it and claim it prosperity; financial success; and happy pain-free living. Yet it is this lack of attention given to “soul transformation issues” that keeps the vast majority of Christians struggling with holiness and living spiritually joyless, defeated, discouraged lives.

**In closing, let me earnestly implore you to expose yourself to the teachings of “soul transformation” on a continual ongoing basis.** I would encourage you to read through this book once a year – that’s just two chapters a month – to keep yourself grounded in the realities of the work of God’s Spirit in your soul. My own experience and the testimonies of countless other believers all around the world, is that when “matters of the soul” are not a continual part of the believer’s spiritual diet, he will find himself drifting from the joyful fellowship of God in Christ Jesus. It is inevitable. There is no such thing as automatic cruise control spirituality, one day a week (Sunday) spiritual maturity, or a chapter a day keeps the devil away theology. It does not exist. If that is the track you’re on, get off that train! You are going in the wrong direction! Stop fooling yourself! Pull up your spiritual boot straps and learn what it means to “walk with God” moment by moment! It cannot be said more passionately – there is no other way! Though the believer’s journey does involve pain and suffering (Ps 32:1-5; Rom 5:3-5; 2 Tim 2:3; Heb 12:5-11; 1 Pet 4:1, 12-13, 17-19; 5:10; 2 Cor 4:8-9), there is also simultaneous joy that accompanies it (Jn 15:1-11; 17:13; Phil 4:4; Jam 1:2; 1 Pet 1: 6-9; 1 Jn 1:4) when there is the ongoing pursuit of holiness and sanctification. Did you catch the caveat of that last statement? Without an ongoing quest to experience the life of Christ, your default mode (the flesh) will overwhelm you and you will find it extremely difficult to “quickly and properly adjust your focus” in the hour of temptation (Rom 12:2; Phil 4:6-8) – the result will be a profound awareness of uncontrollable fleshly thinking. The cure for fleshly thinking? Godly thinking (Gal 5:16ff; Phil 4:8; Col 3:2; Heb 12:2). As James puts it: “Draw near to God and He *will* draw near to you” (Jam 4:8). The key to the Christian life? *Make walking with Christ your life’s ambition!* Let me close with this benediction from Hebrews – “May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).