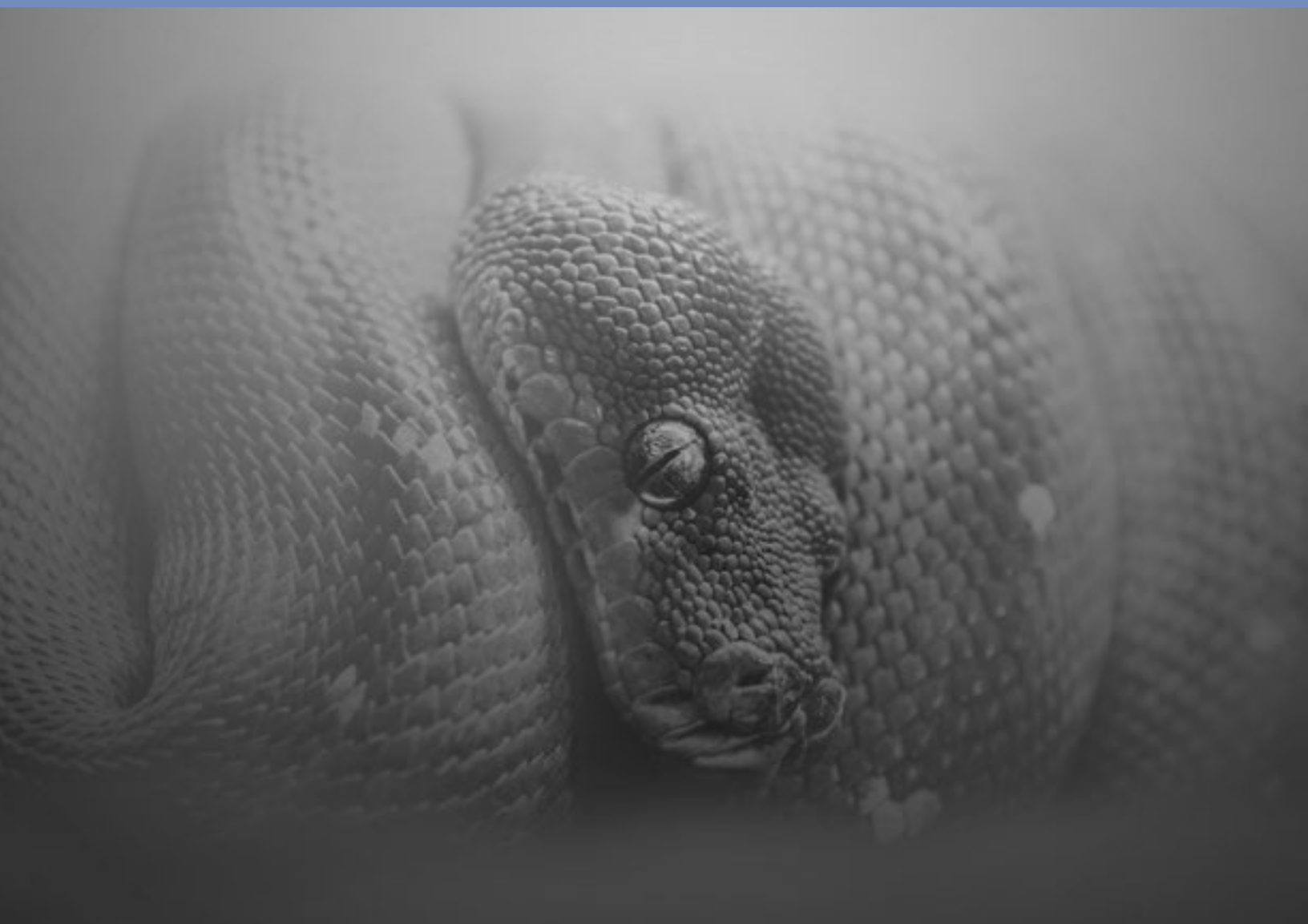


MORTIFICATION OF SIN



JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

MORTIFICATION OF SIN

*The necessity, nature, and means of it;
with a resolution of various cases of
conscience belonging to it*

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:
but if ye through the Spirit do mortify
the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

—Romans 8:13

John Owen

© Copyright 2018 Chapel Library. Original text is in the public domain. In this edition, the text is unabridged, yet carefully updated to improve readability: synonyms substituted for unfamiliar words, punctuation updated, Elizabethan personal pronouns replaced, some sentences re-ordered, explanatory and biographical footnotes added, and headings and sub-headings incorporated into the text.

Printed in the USA. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes. Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided

- 1) you do not charge beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication, and
- 2) this copyright notice and all the text on this page are included.

In the preparation of this edition, Chapel Library has received invaluable assistance from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, where the original text is available: www.ccel.org. A quality hardback edition of the original text is available from The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Chapel Library sends Christ-centered materials from prior centuries worldwide without charge, relying entirely upon God's faithfulness. We therefore do not solicit donations, but we gratefully receive support from those who freely desire to give.

Worldwide, please download material without charge from our website, or contact the international distributor as listed there for your country.

In **North America**, for additional copies of this booklet or other Christ-centered materials from prior centuries, please contact

CHAPEL LIBRARY
2603 West Wright Street
Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Phone: (850) 438-6666 • Fax: (850) 438-0227
chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org

Please see also *The Heavenly Footman* by John Bunyan (1628-1688), *Your Sanctification* by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), or *Free Grace Broadcaster 201, Mortification*—all available from Chapel Library. The *FGB* is a quarterly digest of six to twelve articles from prior centuries, all on one theme, with a different theme developed in each issue. Request a subscription

- worldwide, eBook sent via email:
www.ChapelLibrary.org/broadcaster/fgb-subscriptions/
- in North America, printed copy sent via mail: write Chapel Library
- in a country with an international distributor, printed copy sent via mail; write to them directly:
www.ChapelLibrary.org/broadcaster/fgb-distributors/

MORTIFICATION OF SIN

Contents

Preface.....	1
1 An Exposition of Romans 8:13	
1. Foundation in Romans 8:13.....	3
2. Connection between True Mortification and Salvation.....	3
3. Mortification: The Work of Believers.....	4
4. The Spirit: The Principal Efficient Cause.....	4
5. "Mortify The Deeds of the Body".....	5
2 Continuous Activity of Indwelling Sin	
1. The First Principle for Mortification: It Must Be Continuous.....	7
2. Reasons Mortification Must Be Continuous.....	7
3. The Sad Absence of Mortification.....	11
3 The Holy Spirit's Work in Mortification	
1. The Second Principle for Mortification: The Spirit Is the Effective Cause.....	14
2. Mortification: The Work of the Spirit.....	16
3. How the Spirit Mortifies Sin.....	16
4 Usefulness of Mortification	
1. The Third Principle for Mortification: Life and Comfort Depend on It.....	19
2. Why Life and Comfort Depend on Mortification.....	20
5 What Mortification Is Not	
1. Not to Utterly Destroy Sin.....	22
2. Not to Conceal a Sin.....	23
3. Not to Improve a Quiet Nature.....	23
4. Not to Divert a Sin.....	23
5. Not to Conquer Sin Occasionally.....	24
6 What Mortification Is	
1. Habitual Weakening of Sin.....	26
2. Constant Fighting and Contending against Sin.....	28
3. Success against Sin.....	29
4. Summary.....	30

7	Rules for Mortification <i>A. Faith</i>	
	1. Believe.....	31
	2. Work of Faith	35
	3. Objection: What Shall the Unregenerate Do?.....	36
	4. To Preachers	36
8	Rules for Mortification <i>B. Sincerity and Diligence</i>	
	1. Why Universal Diligence Is Needed.....	38
	2. Reasons For Failure When Focusing on Only One Sin	39
9	Preparatory Directions <i>Dangerous Symptoms</i>	
	1. Consider Dangerous Symptoms.....	41
10	Preparatory Directions <i>Clear Sense of Sin</i>	
	2. Get A Clear Sense of Your Sin	48
11	Preparatory Directions <i>Five Others</i>	
	3. Load Your Conscience with the Guilt of Sin	54
	4. Constantly Long for Deliverance.....	56
	5. Consider Your Particular Temperament.....	57
	6. Watch against Sin's Advantages	58
	7. Rise at the First Evidence of Sin	59
12	Preparatory Directions <i>Meditations upon God</i>	
	8. Exercise Yourself to Meditate upon God	60
13	Preparatory Directions <i>Speak No Peace</i>	
	9. Speak No Peace until God Speaks Peace	67
14	How to Mortify Sin	
	1. Set Faith at Work on Christ	74
	2. Understand the Work of the Spirit.....	80
	Questions for Study and Discussion	82

MORTIFICATION OF SIN

PREFACE

Christian Reader,

I shall in a few words acquaint you with the reasons that obtained my consent to the publishing of the following discourse. Chief among them is the consideration of the present state and condition of the main body of those who profess belief in Christ. The visible evidences of the frame¹ of their hearts and spirits show a great disability for dealing with the temptations with which they are encompassed from the peace they have in the world and the divisions that they have among themselves. This, I am assured, is of so great importance, that if hereby I only occasion others to press more effectually on the consciences of men the work of considering their ways, and to give more clear direction for achieving the mortification of sin, I shall well esteem this undertaking worthwhile. The second reason for publishing this is the observation of some men's dangerous mistakes, who of late have given directions for the mortification of sin and who, being unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel and the efficacy of the death of Christ, have anew imposed the yoke of a self-made mortification on the necks of their disciples, which neither they nor their forefathers were ever able to bear (Act 15:10). The mortification they praise and press is not suitable to that of the gospel either in respect of nature, subject, causes, means, or effects. It constantly produces the deplorable results of superstition, self-righteousness, and anxiety of conscience in them who take up the burden which is so bound for them.

What is here proposed in weakness, I humbly hope will answer the spirit and letter of the gospel, with the experiences of them who know what it is to walk with God according to the tenor of the Covenant of Grace.² So that if not this, yet certainly something of this kind, is very necessary at this season for the promotion and furtherance of this work of gospel mortification in the hearts of believers and for their direction in safe paths, wherein they may find rest to their souls.

I have to add something as to what in particular relates unto myself. Having preached on this subject with some comfortable success, through the grace of Him that administers seed to the sower, I was pressed by various persons in whose hearts are the ways of God, thus to publish what I had delivered, with such additions and alterations as I should judge necessary. Un-

¹ **frame** – condition.

² God's gracious purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him (Gen 3:15; Gen 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3); See *The Covenants of Works and of Grace* by Walter J. Chantry, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

der the inducement of their desires I called to remembrance the debt that I have now for some years owed to various noble and worthy Christian friends, as to a treatise about communion with God, some while since promised to them.³ I thereon apprehended that if I could not at this time provide for the greater debt, yet I might possibly give them this discourse of variance⁴ with themselves as interest for their forbearance of that other work on peace and communion with God.

Besides, I considered that I had been providentially⁵ engaged in the public debate of several controversies in religion, which might seem to claim something in another kind of more general use, as a result of choice, not necessity. On these and the like accounts is this short discourse brought forth to public view and now presented unto you. I hope I may own in sincerity that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life in the station wherein the good providence of God has placed me, are that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own, and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things. If this little discourse (and this is all the account I shall give of its publishing) may in anything be useful to the least of the saints for the achievement of this purpose, it will be looked on as a return of the weak prayers wherewith it is attended by its unworthy author.

—*John Owen, a servant of Jesus Christ in the work of the gospel*

³ Since the first edition of this treatise, that other also is published.—*from the 2nd edition*

⁴ **variance** – discord; battle within a believer as he strives to mortify lust.

⁵ **providentially** – according to God's "most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions" (Psa 103:19; Mat 10:29). (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q.11; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

Chapter 1

AN EXPOSITION OF ROMANS 8:13

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

—Romans 8:13

1. Foundation in Romans 8:13

So that my contribution of directions for mortification in believers may be orderly and clear, I will lay the foundation in the words of the apostle, “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). I will focus on the great evangelical truth and mystery contained in them.

The apostle, having restated his doctrine of justification by faith, and the blessed state and condition of them who are made partakers of it by grace (vv. 1-3), proceeds to improve it to the holiness and consolation of believers.

Among his arguments and motives unto holiness, the verse mentioned contains one from the opposite events⁶ and effects of holiness and sin: “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” What it is to “live after the flesh” and to “die,” I shall no otherwise explain than as they fit in with the sense of the latter words of the verse, as before proposed, since that is not my present aim or business.

In the words peculiarly designed for the foundation of the ensuing discourse, there is,

First, a duty prescribed: “Mortify the deeds of the body.”

Secondly, the persons are denoted to whom it is prescribed: “Ye”—“if ye mortify.”

Thirdly, there is in them a promise annexed to that duty: “Ye shall live.”

Fourthly, the cause or means of the performance of this duty is the Spirit: “If ye through the Spirit.”

Fifthly, the condition of the whole proposition, in which duty, means, and promise are contained: “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

2. Connection between True Mortification and Salvation

The first thing occurring in the words as they lie in the entire proposition is the conditional note: “but if.” Conditionals in such propositions may denote either of two things:

a. The uncertainty of the event or thing promised in respect of those to whom the duty is prescribed. And this takes place where the condition is absolutely necessary in order to cause

⁶ events – consequences.

the result, and does not depend on any determinate cause known to him to whom it is prescribed. So we say, “If we live, we will do such a thing.” This cannot be the intention of the conditional expression in this place. It is said about the persons to whom these words are spoken, “There is no condemnation to them” (Rom 8:1).

b. The certainty of the connection between the things spoken of, as we say to a sick man, “If you will take such a potion, or use such a remedy, you will be well.” The thing we solely intend to express is the certainty of the connection that is between the potion or remedy and health. And this is the use of it here. The certain connection that is between the *mortifying* of the deeds of the body and *living* is intimated in this conditional particle.

Now, since the possible connections of things may be manifold,⁷ as cause and effect or means and end, this connection between mortification and life is not properly of cause and effect, for “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:23). The connection is rather of means and end. God has appointed this means for attaining that end which He has freely promised. Means, though necessary, have a legitimate subordination to a result that is freely promised. A gift and something in the recipient that causes him to receive it are inconsistent. The intention, then, of this conditional proposition is that there is a certain infallible⁸ connection between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that result; if you do mortify, you shall live. The main motive for and enforcement of the duty of mortification lies in this.

3. Mortification: The Work of Believers

The next thing we meet with in the words is the persons to whom this duty is prescribed, and that is expressed in the word *ye*, which in the original is included in the Greek verb *thana-toute*, “if ye mortify”; that is, you believers—you to whom “there is...no condemnation” (8:1); you that are “not in the flesh, but in the Spirit” (8:9); who are “quicken[ed] by his Spirit,” the Spirit of Christ (8:10-11)—to you is this duty prescribed. The pressing of this duty directly on any other persons is a significant result of the superstition and self-righteousness that the world is full of; it is the great work and design of devout men who are ignorant of the gospel (Rom 10:3-4; Joh 15:5).

Now, this description of the persons, in conjunction with the prescription of the duty, is the main foundation of the following discourse as it lies in this thesis or proposition:

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.

4. The Spirit: The Principal Efficient Cause

The principal efficient cause of the performance of this duty is the Spirit: “If by the Spirit.” The Spirit here is the Spirit mentioned in Romans 8:11—the Spirit of Christ, the “Spirit of God” (v. 14), Who dwells in us (v. 9), Who quickens us (v. 11), the “Spirit of adoption” (v. 15), the Spirit that “maketh intercession for us” (v. 26). All other ways of mortification are vain; all helps leave us helpless. It must be done by the Spirit. As the apostle shows, men may attempt

⁷ **manifold** – varied; of many kinds.

⁸ **infallible** – unfailing; not capable of being wrong.

this work on other principles, by means and advantages administered on other accounts as they always have done and do (Rom 9:30-32). But, he says, 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 this is a second principle of my ensuing discourse.

5. “Mortify the Deeds of the Body”

The duty itself, “Mortify the deeds of the body,” is to be considered next. Three things are here to be inquired into: a) What is meant by “the body”; b) What is meant by “the deeds of the body”; c) What is meant by the mortifying of them.

a. “The body”

The “body” in the close of the verse is the same with the “flesh” in the beginning: “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye...mortify the deeds of the body,” that is, the flesh. It is that which the apostle has all along meant by the “flesh,” which is evident from his focus on the contrast between the Spirit and the flesh, before and after. The body, then, is taken here for that corruption and depravity of our natures whereof the body, in a great part, is the seat and instrument—the very members of the body being made servants unto unrighteousness by such corruption (Rom 6:19). It is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust, that is intended. Many reasons might be given for this metonymical expression,⁹ which I shall not now insist on. The “body” here is the same as the “old man” and the “body of sin” (Rom 6:6); or it may synecdochically¹⁰ express the whole person considered as corrupted, and the seat of lusts and distempered affections.¹¹

b. “The deeds of the body”

The Greek word for “deeds of the body” is *praxeis*, which indeed denotes chiefly the outward actions, “the works of the flesh,” as they are called in Galatians 5:19; which are there said to be “manifest,” and are enumerated. Now, though the outward deeds alone are here expressed, yet the inward and next¹² causes are chiefly intended. The axe is to be “laid to the root of the trees” (Mat 3:10). The deeds of the flesh are to be mortified in their causes from which they spring. The apostle calls them “deeds” as that which every lust tends toward. Though it does but conceive and prove abortive, it aims to bring forth a perfect sin.

Both in the seventh chapter and in the beginning of this chapter the apostle has treated of indwelling lust and sin as the fountain and principle of all sinful actions. Having done so, he here mentions its destruction under the name of the effects that it produces. “The deeds of the

⁹ **metonymical expression** or **metonymy** – figure of speech that uses the name of one thing for that of another with which it is associated, as in the use of “Washington” for the U.S. Government

¹⁰ **synecdochically** – pertaining to a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or the whole for a part, as in “Cleveland won by six runs,” meaning “Cleveland’s baseball team won by six home runs.”

¹¹ **distempered affections** – powers in the human soul that work with the body to embrace good and reject evil, which have been diseased and disordered by sin.

¹² **next** – nearest.

body” are the “wisdom of the flesh” as much as the “carnal¹³ mind” (Rom 8:6), by a metonymy of the same nature with the former; or as the “affections [that is, passions] and lusts” of the flesh (Gal 5:24), whence the deeds and fruits of it do arise. “The body” is used in this sense in Romans 8:10, “The body is dead because of sin.”

c. To “mortify”

“If ye do mortify” (or “put to death”) is a metaphorical expression taken from the putting of any living thing to death. To kill a man or any other living thing is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigor, and power, so that he cannot act, exert, or put forth any proper actings¹⁴ of his own. So it is in this case. Indwelling sin is compared to a living person called “the old man,” with his faculties and properties, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, and strength. This, says the apostle, must be killed, put to death, mortified—that is, have its power, life, vigor, and strength to produce its effects taken away by the Spirit. It is indeed *meritoriously* and by way of *example* utterly mortified and slain by the cross of Christ. Therefore, the “old man” is said to be “crucified with” Christ (Rom 6:6), and ourselves to be “dead” with Him (6:8). And it is *really* mortified initially in regeneration,¹⁵ when a principle contrary to it and destructive of it is planted in our hearts (Rom 6:3-5; Gal 5:17). But the whole work is by degrees to be carried on towards perfection all our days. We will say more about this in the process of our discourse. The intention of the apostle in this prescription of the duty mentioned is that the mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies is the *constant duty of believers*, so that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh.

d. “Ye shall live”

The promise joined to this duty is *life*: “Ye shall live.” The life promised is opposed to the death threatened in the previous clause, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die”—which the same apostle expresses as “he...shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal 6:8), or destruction from God. Now, perhaps the word may not only intend eternal life but also spiritual life in Christ that we have here in this life; not as to the essence and being of it, which is already enjoyed by believers, but as to the joy, comfort, and vigor of it. This is as the apostle says in another case: “Now we live, if ye stand fast” (1Th 3:8)—that is, now my life will do me good; I shall have joy and comfort with my life. “Ye shall live”—that is, you shall lead a good, vigorous, comfortable, spiritual life while you are here, and obtain eternal life hereafter.

Supposing what was said before of the connection between mortification and eternal life, as of means and end, I shall add—as a second motive to the duty prescribed—only that *the vigor, power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh*.

¹³ **carnal** – fleshly, as opposed to spiritual.

¹⁴ **actings** – actions.

¹⁵ **regeneration** – God’s act of creating new life in a sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2

CONTINUOUS ACTIVITY OF INDWELLING SIN

1. The First Principle for Mortification: It Must Be Continuous

Having laid this foundation, a brief confirmation of the fore-mentioned principal deductions will lead me to what I chiefly intend:

Principle I: 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.

The apostle says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5). To whom is he speaking? Such as were “risen with Christ” (3:1); such as were “dead” with Him (v. 3); such as have Christ as their “life,” and shall “appear with him in glory” (v. 4). Mortify! Make it your daily work. Be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work. *Be killing sin or it will be killing you!* Your being dead with Christ by identification and your being quickened with Him will not excuse you from this work (Rom 6:3-4).

Our Savior tells us how His Father deals with every branch in Him that bears fruit, every true and living branch: “He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (Joh 15:2). He prunes it, and that not for a day or two, but all the while it is a branch in this world. And the apostle tells you what was his practice: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27). “I do it,” he says, “daily. It is the work of my life. I omit it not. This is my business.” And if this was the work and business of Paul—who was so incomparably exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, consolations, above the ordinary measure of believers—how may we possibly defend an exemption from this work and duty while we are in this world? Mortification must continue throughout the believer’s life on earth. Some brief account of the reasons that this is so may be given.

2. Reasons Mortification Must Be Continuous

a. Indwelling sin always abides

Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world; therefore it is always to be mortified. I meddle not now with the vain, foolish, and ignorant disputes of men about perfectly keeping the commands of God, about perfection in this life, about being wholly and perfectly dead to sin. It is more than probable that the men who hold those abominations never knew what belonged to the keeping of any of God’s commands, and are so much below perfection of

degrees, that they never attained to a perfection of parts in obedience or universal obedience in sincerity.

Therefore many in our day who have talked of perfection have been wiser and have affirmed it to consist in knowing no difference between good and evil—not that they are perfect in the things we call good but that all is alike to them. The height of wickedness is their perfection.

Others have found out a new way to perfection by denying original, indwelling sin, and modifying the spirituality of the Law of God to men’s carnal hearts. They have sufficiently shown themselves to be ignorant of the life of Christ and the power of it in believers, so they have invented a new righteousness that the gospel knows not of, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds.

For us—who dare not be wise above what is written, nor boast by other men’s lives of what God has not done for us—we say that indwelling sin lives in us in some measure and degree while we are in this world. We dare not speak as though we “had already attained, either were already perfect” (Phi 3:12). Our “inward man is [to be] renewed day by day” while we live on this earth (2Co 4:16). According to the renovations of the new are the breaches and decays of the old. While we are here, we “know [but] in part” (1Co 13:12), having a remaining darkness to be gradually removed by our growth “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18). “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit...so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). And we are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light (1Jo 1:8). We have a “body of...death” (Rom 7:24), from which we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies (Phi 3:21).

Now, it being our duty to mortify, to be killing of sin while it is in us, we must be at work. He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, does but half his work (Gal 6:9; Heb 12:1; 2Co 7:1).

b. Activity of indwelling sin

Sin does not only still abide in us, but is still acting, still 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 efforts against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion of it. Sin does not only abide in us, but the “law in my members [is still] warring against the law of my mind” (Rom 7:23); and “the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy” (Jam 4:5). It is always in continual work: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17); lust is still tempting and conceiving sin (Jam 1:14).

In every moral action sin is always either inclining to evil, hindering from that which is good, or discomposing the spirit from communion with God. *It inclines to evil*: “The evil which I would not, that I do,” says the apostle (Rom 7:19). From what source is that? Why, because “in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (7:18). And *it hinders from good*: “The good that I would [do, that] I do not” (7:19)—that is, upon the same account, either I do it not, or not as I should, all my holy things being defiled by this sin. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit...so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). And *it discomposes our spirit*, and thence is called “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb 12:1)—on which account are those grievous complaints that the apostle makes of it (Rom 7). So sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting.

Who can say that he ever had anything to do with God or for God, in which indwelling sin had not a hand in the corrupting of what he did? And sin will continue this practice more or less all our days. If, then, sin will be always acting, and we will not always be 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 end. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, and foolish in proceeding to the ruin thereof, can we expect a comfortable outcome? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so while we live in this world.

I shall discharge him from this duty who can bring sin to a cessation of arms in this warfare. If it will spare him any one day, in any one duty (provided he be a person that is acquainted with the spirituality of obedience and the subtlety of sin), then let him say to his soul regarding this duty: "Soul, take your rest." The saints, whose souls desire deliverance from its perplexing rebellion, know there is no safety against it but in a constant warfare.

c. Results of sin

Sin will not only be striving, acting, rebelling, troubling, disquieting, but if let alone, if 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: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,¹⁶ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Gal 5:19-21). You know what it did in David and many others. Sin aims always at the utmost: every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if it might 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, if sin could fully develop. Men may come to the point that sin may not be heard speaking a scandalous word in their hearts—that is, provoking to any great sin with scandal in its mouth—but yet every rise of lust, if it could have its course, would come to the height of villainy. It is like the grave that is never satisfied (Pro 30:15-16).

And herein 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 some further advances in the same kind. This new acting and pressing forward makes the soul take little notice of what an entrance to a falling off from God is already made. It thinks all is indifferently well if there be no further progress. Now, so far as the soul is made insensible of any sin—that is, as to such a sense as the gospel requires—so far it is hardened. But sin is still pressing forward, and that because it has no bounds but that it proceeds to its ultimate goal: the utter abandonment of God and opposition to Him. That it proceeds towards its height by degrees, making good the ground it has got by hardening the heart, is not from its nature but its deceitfulness.

Now, nothing can prevent this but mortification, which withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that sin is crossed in whatever it aims at. 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 any did of his kind.

¹⁶ **lasciviousness** – moral looseness; inclined to lust or sexual desires.

d. The Spirit given to contend against sin

This is one main reason why the Spirit and the new nature are given to us: so that we may have a principle within by which to oppose sin and lust. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” Well, and what then? Why, “The Spirit [also lusteth] against the flesh” (Gal 5:17). There is a propensity in the Spirit and the spiritual new nature to be acting against the flesh, as well as in the flesh to be acting against the Spirit. It is our participation of the divine nature that gives us an escape from the pollutions that are in the world through lust (2Pe 1:4-5). There is a law of the mind as well as a law of the members (Rom 7:23).

Now, first, this is the most unjust and unreasonable thing in the world: when two combatants are engaged, to bind one and keep him from doing his utmost, and to leave the other at liberty to wound him at his pleasure. Secondly, this is the most foolish thing in the world: to bind Him Who fights for our eternal condition, and to let him alone who seeks and violently attempts 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 assistance which God has 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 has furnished us with a principle for doing it.

e. Negligence of mortification

Negligence in this duty casts the soul into a perfectly contrary condition to that which the apostle affirms was his: “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2Co 4:16). In such negligence, the inward man perishes and the outward man is renewed day by day. Sin becomes as the house of David, and grace as the house of Saul. Exercise and success are the two main cherishers of grace in the heart. When suffered to lie still it withers and decays. The things of it are ready to die (Rev 3:2), and sin gets ground towards the hardening of the heart (Heb 3:13).

This is what I intend: by the omission of this duty grace withers, lust flourishes, and the frame of the heart grows worse and worse. And the Lord knows what desperate and fearful results it has had with many. Where sin gets a considerable victory through the neglect of mortification, it breaks the bones of the soul (Psa 31:10; 51:8) and makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die (Psa 38:3-5) so that he cannot look up (Psa 40:12; Isa 33:24). When poor creatures will take blow after blow, wound after wound, foil¹⁷ after foil, and never rouse up themselves to a vigorous opposition, can they expect anything but to be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13) and that their souls should bleed to death (2Jo 1:8)?

Indeed, it is a sad thing to consider the fearful results of this neglect that lie under our eyes every day. See we not those whom we knew—humble, melting, broken-hearted Christians; tender and fearful to offend; zealous for God and all His ways, His Sabbaths and ordinances—grown, through a neglect of watching unto this duty earthly, carnal, cold, wrathful, complying with the men of the world and things of the world, to the scandal of religion and the fearful temptation of them that know them? The truth is that, between placing mortification in a rig-

¹⁷ foil – defeat.

id, stubborn frame of spirit—which is for the most part earthly, legal, censorious, partial, consistent with wrath, envy, malice, and pride—on the one hand, and pretenses of liberty, grace, and I know not what on the other, true evangelical mortification is almost lost amongst us, of which we will say more later.

f. The first principle of mortification

It is our duty to be “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1), to be growing in grace every day (1Pe 2:2; 2Pe 3:18), to be renewing our “inward man...day by day” (2Co 4:16). Now, this cannot be done without the daily mortifying of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness and against every degree we grow to. Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies¹⁸ of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in this way takes no steps toward his journey’s end. He who finds not opposition from sin—and who sets not himself in every particular to its mortification—is at peace with sin, not dying to it.

This then is the *first general principle* of our ensuing discourse: Notwithstanding the meritorious mortification (if I may so speak) of all and every sin in the cross of Christ;¹⁹ notwithstanding the real foundation of universal mortification laid in our first conversion, by conviction of sin, humiliation for sin, and the implantation of a new principle opposite to it and destructive of it—yet sin does so remain, so act, and work in the best of believers while they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days required of them.

3. The Sad Absence of Mortification

Before I proceed to the consideration of the next principle, I cannot but by the way complain of many professors²⁰ of 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, indeed, a broad light fallen upon the men of this generation, and with it many spiritual gifts communicated, which, with some other considerations, have incredibly enlarged the number of professors and profession; both are exceedingly multiplied and increased. Hence²¹ there is a noise of religion and religious duties in every corner, preaching in abundance; and that not in an empty, light, trivial, and vain manner as formerly, but to a good proportion showing spiritual gift—so that if you will measure the number of believers by light, gifts, and profession, the church may have cause to say, “Who hath begotten me these?” (Isa 49:21).

But now if you will take the measure of them by this great discriminating grace of Christians—that is, mortification of sin—perhaps you will find their number not so multiplied. Where almost is that professor who owes his conversion to these days of light—and so talks and professes at such a rate of spirituality as few in former days, in any measure, were acquainted with (I will not judge them, but perhaps they are boasting of what the Lord has done in them)—that does not give evidence of a miserably unmortified heart? If vain spending of

¹⁸ **walks not over the bellies** – Ancient kings caused conquered enemy leaders to lie down on their backs and would walk on them as a symbol of victory; figurative speech for conquering and mortifying one’s lusts.

¹⁹ **meritorious mortification...Christ** – Through the cross of Christ, those who believe are dead to sin’s reigning power, which is the foundation of our sanctification.

²⁰ **professors** – those who profess faith in Christ but may not be truly regenerate.

²¹ **hence** – for this reason.

time, idleness, unprofitability in men's places, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, selfishness (1Co 1), be badges of Christians, we have them on us and amongst us in abundance. 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 despise gospel light, and for the duty we have in hand, know no more of it but what consists in men's denying themselves sometimes in outward enjoyments (which is one of the outmost branches of it), which yet they will seldom practice? May the good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers,²² or we are in a sad condition!

There are two evils that certainly attend every unmortified professor: the first in himself and the other in respect of others.

a. The evil of lack of mortification in a professing Christian

Let him pretend what he will, the professor without mortification has slight²³ thoughts of sin, at least of sins of daily weakness. The root of an unmortified course is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. When a man has so imagined an apprehension of grace and mercy as to be able to swallow and digest daily sins without bitterness, that man is at the very brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Jud 1:4; Heb 3:13). Neither is there a greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world than to walk in such a condition. To use the blood of Christ, which is given to cleanse us (1Jo 1:7; Ti 2:14); to use the exaltation of Christ, which is to give us repentance (Act 5:31); to use the doctrine of grace, which teaches us to deny all ungodliness (Ti 2:11-12)—in order to support sin, is a rebellion that in the end will break the bones. At this door have gone out from us most of the professors who have left the faith in the days wherein we live. For a while, most of them were under convictions that motivated them to duties and brought them to profession; so they “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 2:20). But having got an acquaintance with the doctrine of the gospel, and being weary of duty (for which they had no principle), they began to encourage themselves in many neglects from the doctrine of grace. Now, when once this evil had laid hold of them, they speedily tumbled into perdition.

b. The evil influence of lack of mortification on unbelievers

The lack of mortification has an evil influence on unbelievers by a twofold account.

1). *It hardens them* by convincing them that they are in as good condition as the best professors. Whatever they see in such a professor is so stained for lack of this mortification that it is of no value to the observer. They have a zeal for religion, but it is accompanied with a lack of forbearance and universal righteousness. They deny prodigality²⁴ but live in worldliness; or 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; or they mention communion with God but are in every way conformed to the world; or they boast of forgiveness of sin yet never forgive others. And with such considerations do poor creatures harden their hearts in their unregeneracy.

²² **distempers** – diseases, that is, our sinful inclinations.

²³ **slight** – superficial; shallow.

²⁴ **prodigality** – reckless extravagance in material things.

2). The professor who lacks mortification deceives unbelievers, in making them believe that if they can come up to the professor's condition it shall be well with them. And so unbelievers are easily tempted to strive for some reputation in religion, and even go far beyond such professors in outward religion, and yet come short of eternal life. But of these things and all the evils of an unmortified life we will consider later.

Chapter 3

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN MORTIFICATION

1. The Second Principle for Mortification: The Spirit Is the Effective Cause

The next principle for mortification relates to the great sovereign cause of mortification, which, in the words laid for the foundation of this discourse, is said to be the Holy Spirit, as was proved earlier.

Principle II: Only the Holy Spirit is sufficient for mortification of sin. All ways and means without Him are as nothing. He is the great effective cause of it. He works in us as He pleases.

a. Other remedies useless

In vain do men seek other remedies; they shall not be healed by them. The other ways prescribed for sin to be mortified are known.

1). Roman Catholicism. The greatest part of popish religion,²⁵ of that which looks most like religion in their profession, consists in mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretense of their rough garments, by which they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, and penances are all built on this ground: they are all for the mortifying of sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotion all look this way. Hence, those who interpret the locusts that came out of the bottomless pit (Rev 9:3) to be the friars of the Romish church—who are said to torment men so that they will “seek death, and shall not find it” (9:6)—think that they did it by their stinging sermons in which they convinced them of sin. In reality, however, not being able to discover the true remedy for the healing and mortifying of sin, they kept them in such perpetual anguish and terror, and such trouble in their consciences, that they desired to die! This, I say, is the substance and glory of their religion. But such glory is their shame (Phi 3:19), what with their laboring to bring mortification to dead creatures, ignorant of the nature and end of the work; what with the poison they mixed with it in their persuasion of its merit; yea, even supererogation²⁶ (as they style their unnecessary merit with a proud, barbarous title)! But of them and their mortification more afterward in chapter seven.

²⁵ **Popish religion** – Roman Catholicism.

²⁶ **supererogation** – in Roman Catholic theology, the performance of good works beyond what God commands or requires, which are held to constitute a store of merit that the Church may dispense to others to make up for their deficiencies.

2). *Professing Protestants.* It is known that the ways and means to be used for the mortification of sin invented by Roman Catholics are still insisted on and prescribed for the same end by some who should have more light and knowledge of the gospel. Such directions to this purpose have of late been given by some, and are greedily grabbed at by others professing themselves Protestants, who might have become popish devotionists three or four hundred years ago. Such outside endeavors, such bodily exercises, such self-performances, such merely legal duties without the least mention of Christ or His Spirit, are covered over with swelling words of vanity for the only means and helps for the mortification of sin. Such reveal a deep-rooted unacquaintedness with the power of God and mystery of the gospel. This consideration was one motive to the publishing of this plain discourse.

b. Reasons they are useless

Now, some reasons among others why the papists²⁷ and these others can never truly mortify any one sin with all their endeavors are as follows.

1). *Because many of the ways and means they use* and insist upon for this end *were never appointed by God* for that purpose. Now, there is nothing in religion that has any effectiveness for achieving an objective, unless God has appointed it for that purpose. Such as these are their rough garments, their vows, penances, disciplines, their course of monastical life, and the like. Concerning these God will say, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa 1:12), and, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men" (Mat 15:9). Of the same nature are various self-vexations insisted on by others.

2). *Because the things that are appointed of God as means*²⁸ *are not used* by them in their due place and order, such as praying, fasting, watching, meditation, and the like. These have their use in the business in hand if they are all looked upon as streams,²⁹ but they look on them as the fountain.³⁰ These things effect and accomplish the end as means only, subordinate to the Spirit and faith; but they look on them to do it by virtue of the work itself. If they fast so much, pray so much, and keep their hours and times, the work is done! As the apostle says of some in another case, they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2Ti 3:7); so they are always mortifying but never come to any sound mortification. In a word, they have various means to mortify the natural man, as to the natural life we lead here; but none to mortify [the root] lust or corruption.

This is the general mistake of men ignorant of the gospel about this thing, and it lies at the bottom of very much of that superstition and will-worship that has been brought into the world. What horrible self-macerations³¹ were practiced by some of the ancient authors of monastical devotion! What violence did they offer to nature! What extremity of sufferings did they put themselves upon! Search their ways and principles to the bottom, and you will find that it

²⁷ **papists** – those loyal to the Pope; Roman Catholics.

²⁸ **means of grace** – God's ways of bestowing His blessings of grace upon His people through Christ and the Holy Spirit, i.e., the preaching of the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, etc.

²⁹ **streams** – Protestants and some Baptists view the Word, ordinances, etc., as means of grace by which the Holy Spirit, the fountain of grace, blesses God's people.

³⁰ **fountain** – Roman Catholicism views the "sacraments" as the primary sources of saving grace to God's people, often without faith on the part of the recipient.

³¹ **self-macerations** – acts of wasting away of the body through fasting or other self-imposed physical sufferings.

had no other root but this mistake: namely, that seeking a severe mortification, they attempted to mortify the natural man instead of the corrupt old man, the physical body we live in instead of the “body of death.”

3). Neither will the *natural popery* that is in others do it. Men are grieved by the guilt of a sin that has prevailed over them; they instantly promise to themselves and God that they will so sin no more. They watch over themselves and pray for a season, until this heat waxes cold and the sense of sin is worn off—and so mortification goes also, and sin returns to its former domination. Duties are excellent food for an unhealthy soul, but they are no physic³² for a sick soul. He that turns his meat into his medicine must expect no great operation. 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 so many concurrent actings in it as no self-endeavor can accomplish. It is of that kind that an almighty energy is necessary for its accomplishment, as shall be made clear later.

2. Mortification: The Work of the Spirit

The mortification of sin is, then, the work of the Spirit. For,

a. He is promised of God to be given unto us to do this work. The taking away of the stony heart—the stubborn, proud, rebellious, unbelieving heart—is in general the work of mortification that we are addressing. Now, this is still promised to be done by the Spirit: God puts His Spirit in us and takes “the stony heart out of [our] flesh” (Eze 11:19; 36:26). By the Spirit of God is this work wrought when all means fail (Isa 57:17-18).

b. We have all our mortification from the gift of Christ, and all the gifts of Christ are communicated to us and given us by the Spirit of Christ: “Without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). All communications of supplies and relief—in the beginnings, increasings, actings of any grace whatever from Him—are by the Spirit, by Whom He alone works in and upon believers. From Him we have our mortification: He is exalted and made “a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to [us]” (Act 5:31); and our mortification is no small portion of our repentance. How does He do it? Having “received...the promise of the Holy Ghost,” He sends Him abroad for that end (Act 2:33). You know the many promises He made of sending the Spirit to do the works that He purposed to accomplish in us (Joh 14:16, etc.).

3. How the Spirit Mortifies Sin

The resolution of one or two questions will now lead me nearer to what I principally intend.

a. The Spirit mortifies

The first is: How does the Spirit mortify sin? I answer: in general, in three ways.

1). By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle puts the fruits of the flesh in opposition to the fruits of the Spirit: “The works of the flesh,” says he, “are [so and so]” (Gal 5:19-

³² **physic** – medicine.

21); “but,” he says, “the fruit of the Spirit” are quite contrary, quite of another sort (5:22-23). Yes, but what if these are in us and abound, may not the other abound also? No, he says, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (v. 24). But how? Why, “we live in the Spirit [and] also walk in the Spirit” (v. 25)—that is, through the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. For, says the apostle, “These are contrary the one to the other” (v. 17), so that they cannot both be in the same subject in any intense or high degree.

This “renewing [of us] by the Holy Ghost,” as it is called (Ti 3:5), is one great way of mortification. He causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces that are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.

2). *By a real physical effectiveness 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” (Isa 4:4), really consuming and destroying our lusts. He takes away the stony heart by an almighty effectiveness; for as He begins this kind of work so He carries it on in its progressive degrees. He is the fire that burns up the very root of lust.

3). *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. About the manner of this we will write more later.

b. Our part in mortifying

Secondly, if this be the work of the Spirit alone, how is it that we are exhorted to it? Seeing the Spirit of God only can do it, let the work be left wholly to Him.

1). *The Spirit's work*. The work of the Spirit in mortification is no different from all graces and good works that are in us, which are His. He “worketh in you both to will and to do of his [own] good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). He works “all our works in us” (Isa 26:12): “the work of faith with power” (2Th 1:11; Col 2:12); He causes us to pray, and is a Spirit of supplication (Eph 6:18; Rom 8:26; Zec 12:10). And yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted, to all these.

2). *Our obedience*. He does not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our obedience. The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us as we are fit to be worked in and on; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He 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; so that His assistance is an encouragement as to the enabling of the work, and no occasion to neglect the work itself.

Indeed, I might here bewail the endless, foolish labor of poor souls who—being convinced of sin, and not able to stand against the power of their convictions—set themselves to keep down sin by innumerable perplexing ways and duties; but all in vain, being strangers to the Spirit of God. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days. They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which profiteth not (Isa 55:2).

This is the saddest warfare in which any poor creature can be engaged. A soul under the power of conviction from the Law is pressed to fight against sin, but has no strength for the combat. They cannot but fight, but they can never conquer. They are like men thrust on the sword of enemies to be slain on purpose. The Law drives them on, and sin beats them back.

Sometimes they think, indeed, that they have foiled sin, when they have only raised a dust that they see it not; that is, they disturb their natural affections of fear, sorrow, and anguish, which makes them believe that sin is conquered, when it is not touched. By the time they have cooled off they must begin the battle again; and the lust that they thought to be slain appears to have had no wound.

And if the case be so sad with them who do labor and strive and yet enter not into the kingdom, what is their condition who despise all this: who are perpetually under the power and dominion of sin, and love to have it so; who are troubled at nothing, but that they cannot make sufficient “provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14)!

Chapter 4

USEFULNESS OF MORTIFICATION

1. The Third Principle for Mortification: Life and Comfort Depend on It

The last principle I shall insist on (omitting, first, the necessity of mortification unto life and, secondly, the certainty of life upon mortification) is,

Principle III: That the life, vigor, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.

Strength, comfort, 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 heads: either we lack strength and power, vigor and life, in our obedience, in our walking with God; or we lack peace, comfort, and consolation therein. Whatever it is that may befall a believer that does not belong to one of these two heads does not deserve to be mentioned in the days of our complaints.³³

Now, all these do much depend on a constant course of mortification, concerning which observe the following.

a. They do not proceed from mortification 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 (Psa 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 him an example to them that afterward should be in distress. Can you complain if it be with you like it was with Heman, that eminent servant of God? This shall be his praise to the end of the world. God makes it His prerogative to speak peace and consolation. “I will heal him,” says God; “I will...restore comforts unto him” (Isa 57:18). But how? By a direct work of the new creation: “I create the fruit of the lips,” says God (v. 19). The use of means for the obtaining of peace is ours; the bestowing of it is God’s prerogative.

b. Mortification not a direct cause. Mortification is not one of the direct causes instituted by God to give us life, vigor, courage, and comfort in our souls. These things are the privileges of our adoption made known to our souls. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16), giving us a new name and a white stone (Rev 2:17). Our sense and assurance of adoption and justification, then, are the direct causes (in the hand of the Spirit) of life, vigor, courage, and comfort. But this I say,

³³ **in the days of our complaints** – during our life on this earth, when we experience many woes.

c. Life and comfort depend upon mortification. 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. Mortification is not only a *causa sine qua non*³⁴ of life and comfort, but also effectively works in bringing them about. We shall now consider the reasons for this.

2. Why Life and Comfort Depend on Mortification

a. Mortification alone keeps sin from depriving us

Mortification alone keeps sin from depriving us of these blessings. Every unmortified sin will certainly do two things: a) It will weaken the soul and deprive it of its vigor. b) It will darken the soul and deprive it of its comfort and peace.

1). *Unmortified sin weakens the soul and deprives it of its strength.*

Unmortified sin weakens the soul and deprives it of its strength. When David had for a while harbored an unmortified lust in his heart, it broke all his bones and left him no spiritual strength; hence he complained that he was sick, weak, wounded, and faint. “There is,” he says, “no soundness in my flesh” (Psa 38:3); “I am feeble and sore broken” (v. 8), “so that I am not able to look up” (Psa 40:12). An unmortified lust will drink up the spirit and all the vigor of the soul, and weaken it for all duties. For,

1st. Unmortified sin unsettles the heart itself by entangling its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual disposition that is required for vigorous communion with God; it lays hold on the affections, rendering its object beloved and desirable, and so expelling the love of the Father (1Jo 2:15; 3:17); so that the soul cannot say uprightly and truly to God, “Thou art my portion” (Psa 119:57), having something else that it loves instead. Fear, desire, and hope, which are the choice affections of the soul and should be full of God, will be one way or other entangled with the unmortified sin.

2nd. Unmortified sin fills the thoughts with schemes about it. Thoughts are the great purveyors³⁵ of the soul to bring in provision to satisfy its affections; and if sin remains unmortified in the heart, those thoughts must ever and anon be making “provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). They must glaze, adorn, and dress the objects of the flesh, and bring them home to give satisfaction. They are able to do this beyond all expression in the service of a defiled imagination.

3rd. Unmortified sin breaks out and actually hinders duty. The ambitious man must be studying, and the worldling must be working or contriving, and the sensual, vain person providing himself for vanity, when they should be engaged in the worship of God.

Were it my present business to set forth the breaches, ruin, weakness, and desolations that one unmortified lust will bring upon a soul, this discourse must be extended much beyond my intention.³⁶

³⁴ *causa sine qua non* – Latin = indispensable or necessary condition.

³⁵ *purveyors* – persons who supply provisions; therefore, used here figuratively to illustrate thoughts making provision for the fulfilment of a person’s desires.

³⁶ Owen wrote the related works *Indwelling Sin* and *Temptation*. See also Free Grace Broadcasters 160, *Temptation*; 209, *Secret Sins*, and 240, *The Sinfulness of Sin*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

2). As sin weakens the soul, so it darkens the soul.

As sin weakens the soul, so it darkens the soul. It is a cloud, 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—of which I will say more later.

Now, in this regard the vigor and power of our spiritual life depends on our mortification. It is the only means of the removal of the unmortified sin that will allow us neither vigor nor 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; they “shall not be healed” (Eze 47:11). So, “Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound” (Hos 5:13), and attempted various remedies. Nothing will do until they come to “acknowledge their offence” (5:15). Men may see their sickness and wounds, but yet if they make not due applications, their cure will not be effected.

b. Mortification prunes all the graces of God

Mortification prunes all the graces of God and makes room for them to grow in our hearts. The life and vigor of our spiritual lives consists in the vigor and flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts. Now, as you may see in a garden, let there be a precious herb planted, but let the ground be untilled and weeds grow about it. Perhaps it will live still, but be a poor, withering, unuseful thing. You must look and search for it, and sometimes can scarce find it; and when you do, you can scarce know it whether it is the plant you look for or not—and suppose it is, you can make no use of it at all. But let another of the same kind be set in the ground, naturally as barren and bad as the other; let it be well weeded, and everything that is noxious and hurtful removed from it. It flourishes and thrives. You may see it at your first look into the garden, and have it for your use when you please.

So it is with the graces of the Spirit that are planted in our hearts. It is true that they are still there; they abide in a heart where there is some neglect of mortification. But they are ready to die; they are withering and decaying (Rev 3:2). The heart is 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. They remain indeed, but are ready to die. But now let the heart be cleansed by mortification, 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. How will every grace act its part, and be ready for every use and purpose!

c. Our peace

As to our peace, as there is nothing that has any evidence of sincerity without mortification, so I know nothing that has such an evidence of sincerity in it as there is in mortification—which is no small foundation of our peace. Mortification is the soul's vigorous opposition to self; in such opposition sincerity is most evident.

Chapter 5

WHAT MORTIFICATION IS NOT

These things being premised, I come to my principal intention: handling some questions or practical cases that present themselves in this business of mortification of sin in believers.

The first, which is the head of all the rest, and whereunto they are reduced, may be considered as lying under the following proposal.

Suppose a man to be 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, or corruption—to such a degree that, though it be not utterly destroyed, yet in his contest with it, he may be enabled to keep up power, strength, and peace in communion with God?

In answer to this important inquiry, I shall do these things:

- I. Show what it is to mortify any sin, and that both negatively and positively, that we be not mistaken in the foundation.³⁷
- II. Give general directions for such things as without which it will be utterly impossible for anyone to get any sin truly and spiritually mortified.³⁸
- III. Draw out the particulars whereby this is to be done, in the whole carrying on this consideration, that it is not of the doctrine of mortification in general, but only in reference to the particular case before proposed, that I am treating.

We begin, then, with the first head: I. What Mortification Is, and deal with the foundational question in this first section: What Mortification Is Not.

1. Not to Utterly Destroy Sin

To mortify a sin is not utterly to kill, root it out, and destroy it, so that it has 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, and desires its utter destruction so that it leaves 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 “not-being” is the thing aimed at.

³⁷ This head (I.) includes What Mortification Is Not, which comprises Chapter 5; and What Mortification Is, which comprises Chapter 6.

³⁸ This head (II.) includes Owen’s two general rules for mortification, Chapters 7 and 8.

Now, though doubtless there may be attained, by the Spirit and grace of Christ, a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any sin—so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it—yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should not exist at all, is not in this life to be expected. This Paul assures us of: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect” (Phi 3:12). He was a choice saint, a pattern for believers, who had not his equal in the world in faith and love and all the fruits of the Spirit, and on that account ascribes perfection to himself in comparison to others, as shown by his statement: “Let us...as many as be perfect” (Phi 3:15);³⁹ yet he had not “attained,” he was not “perfect,” but was “following after.” He still had a vile body, as do we, that must be changed by the great power of Christ at last (3:21). This we desire to have; but God sees it best for us that we should be complete in nothing in ourselves, so that in all things we must be “complete in Christ”—which is best for us (Col 2:10).

2. Not to Conceal a Sin

I think I do not need to say it is not the dissimulation⁴⁰ 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. But God knows that to his former iniquity he has added cursed hypocrisy and is got in a more sure path to hell than he was in before. He has got another heart than he had that is more cunning, not a new heart that is more holy.

3. Not to Improve a Quiet Nature

The mortification of sin consists not in the improvement⁴¹ 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 are a standing cesspool of all abominations. Perhaps some man is never so much troubled all his life with anger and passion, nor troubles others, as another is almost every day; and yet the latter has done more to the mortification of the sin than the former. Let not such persons try their mortification by things which their natural disposition does not tend toward. Let them attempt to deny self or to mortify unbelief, envy, or some such spiritual sin, and they will have a better view of themselves.

4. Not to Divert a Sin

A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted. Simon Magus⁴² for a season left his sorceries; but his covetousness and ambition, which had set him on his work, remained still, and would have been acting another way. Therefore Peter tells him, “I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness” (Act 8:23)—that is, notwithstanding the profession you have made, notwithstand-

³⁹ Many conservative scholars understand “perfect” to mean “spiritually mature,” not sinless perfection.

⁴⁰ **dissimulation** – deceitful concealment.

⁴¹ **improvement** – advantageous use of what is already in man’s nature.

⁴² **Simon Magus** – the sorcerer of Acts 8:9-24 (*magus* is Latin for “magician”).

ing your relinquishment of your sorceries, your lust is as powerful as ever. It is the same lust; only the streams of it are diverted. It now exerts and puts forth itself another way, but it is the old gall of bitterness still.

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. This is as he who heals and skins a running sore thinks himself cured, but in the meantime his flesh festers underneath by the corruption of the same infection and breaks out in another place. And this diversion, with the alterations that attend it, often befalls men for reasons wholly foreign to grace.

Change of the course of life that a man was in—of relations, interests, designs—may effect⁴³ it; yea, the very alterations in men's constitutions, occasioned by a natural progress in the course of their lives, may produce such changes as these. Men in age do not usually persist in the pursuit of youthful lusts, although they have never mortified any of them.

And the same is the case of trading lusts: a man's leaving off from serving one so that he may 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 changed his master but is a servant still.

5. Not to Conquer Sin Occasionally

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.

a. When sin erupts suddenly

A man may consider a sin mortified 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 abhorrence of sin and himself (for doing 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 before him as if dead.

This is just as one who has drawn near to an army in the night and has killed a high-ranking person. Instantly the guards awake, men are roused up, and strict inquiry is made after the enemy, who hides himself or lies like one that is dead in the meantime until the noise and tumult be over, yet with firm resolution to do the like mischief again upon the like opportunity. Upon the sin among the Corinthians, see how they muster up themselves for the surprise and destruction of it (2Co 7:11).

So it is in a person when a breach has been made upon his conscience, peace, or reputation by his lust in some eruption of actual sin. Carefulness, indignation, desire, fear, and revenge are all set at work about it and against it; and lust is quiet for a season, being run down before them. But when the hurry is over and the inquest⁴⁴ past, the thief appears again alive and is as busy as ever at his work.

⁴³ **effect** – cause.

⁴⁴ **inquest** – investigation of the situation.

b. When in some affliction

In a time of some judgment, calamity, or pressing affliction, the heart is taken up with thoughts and contrivances of flying from the present troubles, fears, and dangers. This, as a convinced⁴⁵ person concludes, is to be done only by relinquishing sin, which gains peace with God. It is the anger of God in every affliction that galls⁴⁶ a convinced person. To be relieved of this, men resolve at such times to fight against their sins. Sin never again shall have any place in them; they will never again give up themselves to the service of it. Accordingly, sin is quiet, stirs not, and seems to be mortified; not indeed that it has received any wound, but merely because the soul has possessed its faculties,⁴⁷ whereby it should exert itself with thoughts against the motions of that sin—which, when they are laid aside, sin returns again to its former life and vigor.

Those described in Psalm 78 are a full instance and description of this frame of spirit whereof I speak:

For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they *returned* and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant (Psa 78:32-37).

I no way doubt but that when they sought, returned, and inquired early after God, they did it with full purpose of heart as to the relinquishing of their sins; it is expressed in the word *returned*. To turn or return to the Lord is by a forsaking of sin. This they did “early,” with earnestness and diligence; but yet their sin was unmortified for all this (vv. 36-37). This is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction. A great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves often lies here.

These and many other ways there are whereby poor souls deceive themselves and suppose they have mortified their lusts when [their lusts] live and are mighty, and on every occasion break forth to their disturbance and disquiet.

⁴⁵ **convinced** – brought to a state of conviction; firmly persuaded.

⁴⁶ **galls** – irritates and unsettles.

⁴⁷ **faculties** – powers or properties of one’s mind.

Chapter 6

WHAT MORTIFICATION IS

What it is to mortify a sin in general, which will make further way for particular directions, is next to be considered.⁴⁸

The mortification of a lust consists in three things. The first thing in mortification is the weakening of this habit of sin or lust. The second thing in mortification is a constant fighting and contending against sin. The third part of mortification is a frequent success against any lust.

1. Habitual Weakening of Sin

The first thing in mortification is the weakening of this habit of sin. Every lust is a depraved habit or disposition, continually inclining the heart to evil. Thence is that description of him who has no lust truly mortified: “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was 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 one lust, night and day, is because he has many to serve, every one crying to be satisfied. Thence he is carried on with great variety, but still in general he lies towards the satisfaction of self.

We will suppose, then, the lust or distemper whose mortification is inquired after to be in itself a strong, deeply-rooted, habitual inclination and bent of will and affections to some actual sin as to the *matter* of it—though not, under that formal consideration, always stirring up imaginations, thoughts, and contrivances about the *object* of it. Hence, men are said to have their “hearts...fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11), that is, the bent of their spirits lies towards it, to make “provision for the flesh” (Rom 13:14).

A sinful, depraved habit—as in many other things, so in this—differs from all natural or moral habits whatever. Whereas moral habits incline the soul gently and suitably to itself, sinful habits drive with violence and impetuosity.⁴⁹ From this, lusts are said to fight or wage “war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11), that is, to rebel or rise up in war with that conduct and opposition which is usual therein (Rom 7:23), to lead captive, or effectively capturing upon success in battle—all works of great violence and impetuosity.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ This chapter is a continuation of the first head (I.) describing mortification, begun in Chapter 5 with section 1 detailing what mortification is not. This chapter is section 2 of that same head.

⁴⁹ **impetuosity** – strong emotion.

⁵⁰ I might manifest fully, from that description we have of it in Romans 7, how it will darken the mind, extinguish convictions, dethrone reason, interrupt the power and influence of any considerations that may be brought to hamper it, and break through all into a flame. But this is not my present business.—*from the original*

Now, the first thing in mortification is the weakening of this habit of sin or lust, that it shall not—with that violence, earnestness, and frequency—rise up, conceive, disturb, provoke, entice, or disquiet as naturally it is apt to do (Jam 1:14-15).

a. Limitations to this truth

I shall desire to give one caution or rule by the way, and it is this: though every lust does in its own nature, equally and universally, incline and impel to sin, yet this must be granted with these two limitations.

1). *The strength of lusts varies*

One lust, or a lust in one man, may receive many accidental improvements, heightenings, and strengthenings, which may give it life, power, and vigor exceedingly above what another lust has, or above the same kind of lust in another man. When a lust falls in with the natural constitutions and temper, with a suitable course of life, with occasions, or when Satan has got a fit handle to it to manage it—as he has a thousand ways so to do—that lust grows violent and impulsive above others, or more than the same lust in another man. Then the steams of it darken the mind, so that though a man knows the same things as formerly, yet they have no power nor influence on the will, but corrupt affections and passions are set at liberty by it.

But especially, lust gets strength by temptation. When a suitable temptation falls in with a lust, it gives it a new life, vigor, power, violence, and rage, which before it seemed not to have or to be capable of. Instances to this purpose might be multiplied, but it is the design of some part of another treatise to prove this observation.

2). *Some lusts more discernible*

Some lusts are far more sensible and discernible in their violent actings than others. Paul puts a difference between uncleanness⁵¹ and all other sins: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1Co 6:18). Hence, 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 uncleanness, yet it makes not so great a combustion in the whole man.

And on this account some men may go for mortified men in their own thoughts and in the eyes of the world, who yet have in them no less predominance of lust than those who cry out with astonishment upon the account of its perplexing disturbances—yea, than those who have by the power of it been hurried into scandalous sins. However, it is only that their lusts are in and about things which raise not such a tumult in the soul, about which they are exercised with a calmer frame of spirit, their very temperament being not so nearly concerned in them as in some other.

b. Crucifying the flesh

I say, then, that the first thing in mortification is the weakening of this habit so that it shall not impel and disturb as formerly—that it shall not entice and draw aside; that it shall not disquiet and perplex the killing of its life, vigor, promptness, and readiness to be stirring. This is called crucifying “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24); that is, taking away its

⁵¹ **uncleanness** – unlawful indulgence of sexual desire.

blood and spirits that give it strength and power, the wasting of the body of death “day by day” (2Co 4:16).

A man nailed to the cross first struggles, strives, and cries out with great strength and might; but, as his blood and spirits waste, his strivings are faint and seldom, his cries low and hoarse, scarce to be heard. Similarly, when a man first sets on 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 seldom and faintly, cries 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, as in the whole chapter, so especially in Romans 6:6, the “old man is crucified with” Christ. Sin, he says, is crucified; it is fastened to the cross. To what end? “That the body of sin might be destroyed,” the power of sin weakened and abolished little by little, that “henceforth we should not serve sin”; that is, that sin might not incline us, drive us, with such effectiveness as to make us servants to it as it has done up until now.

And this is spoken not only with respect to carnal and sensual affections, or desires of worldly things—not only in respect of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jo 2:16)—but also as to the flesh, that is, in the mind and will, in that opposition unto God which is in us by nature. Of whatever nature the troubling corruption is, by whatever ways it makes itself out, either by driving to evil or hindering from that which is good, the rule is the same. Unless this mortification be done effectively, all after-contention will not reach the goal aimed at. A man may beat down the bitter fruit from an evil tree until he is weary while the root abides in strength and vigor. The beating down of the present fruit will not hinder it from bringing forth more. This is the folly of some men: they set themselves with all earnestness and diligence against the appearing eruption of lust; but, leaving the principle and root untouched, perhaps unsearched out, they make but little or no progress in this work of mortification.

2. Constant Fighting and Contending against Sin

To be able always to be laying load on sin is no small degree of mortification. When sin is strong and vigorous the soul is scarce able to make any head against it. It sighs, groans, mourns, and is troubled, but seldom has sin in the pursuit. David speaks of himself, complaining that his sin had “taken fast hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up” (Psa 40:12). How little then was he able to fight against it!

Now, various things are required for and involved in this fighting against sin.

a. Recognize the battle

To know that a man has such an enemy to deal with, to take notice of it, to consider it as an enemy indeed, and one that is to be destroyed by all means possible, is required hereunto. As I said before, the contest is vigorous and hazardous: it is about the things of eternity. When therefore men have slight and transient thoughts of their lusts, it is no great sign that they are mortified or that they are in a way for their mortification. This is every man’s knowing “the plague of his own heart” (1Ki 8:38), without which no other work can be done. It is to be feared that very many have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with

them in their bosoms. This makes them ready to justify themselves and to be impatient with reproof or admonition, not knowing that they are in any danger (2Ch 16:10).

b. Know the enemy

To labor to be acquainted with the ways, wiles, methods, advantages, and occasions of sin's success is the beginning of this warfare. This is the way men deal with enemies. They inquire about their counsels and designs, ponder their goals, consider how and by what means they have formerly prevailed, so that they may be prevented. In this consists the greatest skill in conduct. Take this away, and all waging of war would be brutish, even where there is the greatest use of human wisdom and industry.

Indeed, men who mortify lust deal with it in this way. Not only when lust is actually vexing, enticing, and seducing, but in their quiet moments they consider, "This is our enemy; this is his way and progress, these are his advantages, thus has he prevailed, and thus he will do, if not prevented." So it was with David: "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3). Indeed, one of the choicest and most eminent parts of spiritual wisdom, practically applied, consists in finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin. A good part of our warfare is to consider and know

- wherein its greatest strength lies;
- what advantage it takes of occasions, opportunities, and temptations;
- what are its pleas, pretenses, and reasonings;
- and what are its strategies, colors,⁵² and excuses.

A good part of our warfare is

- to set the wisdom of the Spirit against the craft of the old man;
- to trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings;
- to be able to say, at its most secret and (to a common frame of heart) imperceptible⁵³ actings: "This is your old way and course; I know what you aim at";
- and so to be always in readiness.

c. Attack daily

The height of this contest is to load sin daily with all the things that are grievous, killing, and destructive to sin, which shall be mentioned later. Such a one never thinks his lust dead because it is quiet, but labors still to give it new wounds, new blows every day. So the apostle says in Colossians 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members..." etc.

Now, while the soul is thus dealing in this condition, it certainly has the upper hand: sin is under the sword and dying.

3. Success against Sin

Frequent success against any lust is another part and evidence of mortification. By "success" I do not mean a mere disappointment of sin, so that it is not brought forth nor accomplished, but a victory over it and pursuit of it, resulting in a complete conquest. For instance, when the heart finds sin at work at any time—seducing, forming imaginations to make provi-

⁵² **colors** – disguises; pretenses.

⁵³ **imperceptible** – so slight as not to be detected.

sion for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof—it instantly apprehends sin, brings it to the Law of God and love of Christ, condemns it, and follows it with execution to the uttermost.

Now, I say, sin is mortified in some considerable measure when a man comes to this state and condition: 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 nor interrupt his peace. Sin is mortified in some considerable measure when he can, in a quiet, sedate frame of spirit, discover and fight against sin, and have success against it. Then, notwithstanding all sin's opposition, a man may have peace with God all his days.

4. Summary

Unto these heads, then, I refer the mortification aimed at—the mortification, that is, of any one perplexing distemper, whereby the general depravity and corruption of our nature attempts to exert itself.

First, the foundation of mortification is the weakening of sin's indwelling disposition—whereby it inclines, entices, impels to evil, rebels, opposes, and fights against God—by the implanting, habitual residence, and cherishing of a principle of grace that stands in direct opposition to sin and is destructive of it. So pride is weakened by the implanting and growth of humility, passion is weakened by patience, uncleanness is weakened by purity of mind and conscience, love of this world is weakened by heavenly-mindedness. These latter are graces of the Holy Spirit, or the same habitual grace variously acting itself by the Spirit according to the variety or diversity of the objects about which it is exercised. The former are various lusts, or the same natural corruption variously acting itself according to the various advantages and occasions that it meets with.

A second thing required for mortification is the promptness, eagerness, and vigor of the Spirit, or new man (Col 3:10), in contending with, cheerfully fighting against, the lust spoken of, by all the ways and with all the means that are appointed thereunto, constantly using the support provided against its motions and actings.

Success unto several degrees attends these two.

If the distemper has not an unconquerable advantage from its natural situation, this may possibly be to such a universal conquest as the soul may never again sensibly feel its opposition. The soul shall assuredly arise to an allowance of peace to the conscience according to the tenor of the Covenant of Grace.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ **tenor of the Covenant of Grace** – nature and character of what God has provided in Christ by the Covenant.

Chapter 7

RULES FOR MORTIFICATION

A. Faith

Beginning in Chapter 5, we have been dealing with the practical aspects of mortification. What must a man do to mortify his indwelling sin? To answer, we are considering three headings:

- I. Show what it is to mortify any sin, and that both negatively (ch. 5) and positively (ch. 6), that we be not mistaken in the foundation.
- II. Give general directions for such things as without which it will be utterly impossible for anyone to get any sin truly and spiritually mortified.
- III. Draw out particular actions whereby this is to be done.⁵⁵

The second head (II.) comes now under consideration: the ways and means whereby a soul may proceed to the mortification of any particular lust and sin, which Satan takes advantage of to disquiet and weaken him.

Now, there are some general considerations to be premised concerning some principles and foundations of this work, without which no man in the world can attain thereunto, even if he is very much raised by convictions and resolved for the mortification of any sin. The general rules and principles without which no sin will be ever mortified are as follows:

1. Believe

a. Belief required for mortification

1). The first rule

A. Unless a man be a believer, one that is truly engrafted into Christ, he can never mortify any one sin.

I do not say, unless he knows himself to be so, but unless indeed he is so. Mortification is the work of believers: “If ye *through the Spirit* do mortify,” etc. (Rom 8:13)—you believers, to whom there is no condemnation (8:1). 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” (3:1), whose “life is hid with Christ in God” (3:3), who shall “appear with him in glory” (3:4). An unregenerate man may do something like it, but he can never perform the work itself so as it may be acceptable with God. You know what a picture of it is drawn in some of the phi-

⁵⁵ These opening comments have been adapted from chapter five by the editors to assist the reader.

losophers: Seneca, Tully, Epictetus.⁵⁶ What affectionate discourses they have about contempt of the world and self, about regulating and conquering all exorbitant affections and passions! The lives of most of them showed that their teachings differed as much from true mortification as the sun painted on a sign-post from the sun in the heavens: they had neither light nor heat.⁵⁷ Their own Lucian⁵⁸ sufficiently manifests what they all were. There is no death of sin without the death of Christ.

You know what attempts there are made after mortification by the papists in their vows, penances, and satisfactions. I dare say of them (I mean as many of them as act upon the principles of their church, as they call it) what Paul says of Israel in point of righteousness. They have followed after mortification, but they have “not attained to” it (Rom 9:31). Wherefore? “Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (9:32). The same is the state and condition of all among ourselves who, in obedience to their convictions and awakened consciences, attempt to forsake sin. They follow after it, but they do not attain it.

2). *The Spirit required*

It is true: it is, it will be, required of every person who hears the Law or gospel preached, that he mortify sin. It is his duty, but it is not his immediate⁵⁹ duty; it is his duty to do it, but to do it in God’s way. If you require your servant to pay so much money for you in such a place, but first to go and collect it in another, it is his duty to pay the money appointed, and you will blame him if he does not do it. Yet it was not his immediate duty: he was first to collect it according to your direction. So it is in this case: sin is to be mortified, but something is to be done in the first place to enable us thereunto.

I have proved that it is the Spirit alone that can mortify sin; He is promised to do it, and all other means without Him are empty and vain. How shall he mortify sin, then, who has not the Spirit? A man may easier see without eyes and speak without a tongue than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit. Now, how is the Spirit attained? He is the Spirit *of Christ*; and as the apostle says, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). Therefore, if we are Christ’s and have an interest in Him,⁶⁰ then we have the Spirit, and by this alone have power for mortification. The apostle discusses this in depth: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). This is the inference and conclusion he makes of his foregoing discourse about our natural state and condition, and the enmity we have unto God and His Law therein. If we are in the flesh, if we have not the Spirit, we cannot do anything that should please God.

But what is our deliverance from this condition? “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (8:9)—that is, you believers, who have the

⁵⁶ **Seneca** (Lucius Annaeus) (c. 4 BC - AD 65) – Roman philosopher, statesman, and orator; Rome’s leading intellectual of his day.

Tully (Marcus Tullius) (also Cicero) (106 - 43 BC) – Roman writer, statesman, philosopher, orator.

Epictetus (c. AD 55 - 135) – Greek-speaking Stoic philosopher.

⁵⁷ **neither light nor heat** – neither truth or power for holy living.

⁵⁸ **Lucian** of Samosata (c. AD 125 - c. 180) – rhetorician and satirist who wrote in the Greek language. He is noted for his witty and scoffing nature. His notable works include *Dialogues of the Gods*, *Dialogues of the Dead*, and many works of fiction.

⁵⁹ **immediate** – first.

⁶⁰ **interest in Him** – union with Christ.

Spirit of Christ, you “are not in the flesh.” There is no way of deliverance from the state and condition of being in the flesh but by the Spirit of Christ. And what if this Spirit of Christ be in you? Why, then, you are mortified: “The body is dead because of sin,” or *unto* sin (v. 10). Mortification is carried on; the new man is quickened to righteousness. This the apostle proves from the union we have with Christ by the Spirit, which will produce suitable operations in us to what it wrought in Him (v. 11). All attempts, then, for mortification of any lust without an interest in Christ are vain.

3). Human efforts fail

Many men that are vexed with and for sin—by the arrows of Christ for conviction, by the preaching of the Word, or by some affliction having been made sharp in their hearts—do vigorously set themselves against this or that particular lust, wherewith 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 silver” (Mal 3:2-3)—that is, take away their dross and tin, their filth and blood (Isa 4:4). But men must *be* gold and silver at their core, or else refining will do them no good.

The prophet gives us the sad result of wicked men’s utmost attempts for mortification, by whatever means God affords them: “The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain...Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them” (Jer 6:29-30). And what is the reason hereof? They were “brass and iron” when they were put into the furnace (v. 28). Men may refine brass and iron a very long time before they will be good silver!

I say then, mortification is not the present business of unregenerate men. God calls them not to it as yet. Conversion is their work, the conversion of the whole soul—not the mortification of this or that particular lust. You would laugh at a man that you should see setting up a great structure and never take any care for a foundation—especially if you should see him so foolish as to continue in the same course after having a thousand experiences of what he built at one time falling down at another. So it is with convinced persons: though they plainly see that what ground they get against sin one day they lose in another, yet they will go on in the same road still without inquiring where the destructive flaw lies in their progress.

4). The Scriptures

When the Jews, upon the conviction of their sin, were cut to the heart and cried out, “What shall we do?” (Act 2:37), 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, but he calls them to conversion and faith in Christ in general (v. 38). Let the soul be first thoroughly converted, and then, looking “on him whom they pierced” (Joh 19:37), humiliation and mortification will ensue. Thus, when John came to preach repentance and conversion, he said, “Now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees” (Mat 3:10). The Pharisees had been laying heavy burdens, imposing tedious duties and rigid means of mortification, in fastings, washings, and the like, all in vain. John says in effect, “The doctrine of conversion is for you; the axe in my hand is laid to the root.”

And our Savior tells us what is to be done in this case, saying, “Do men gather grapes from thorns?” (Mat 7:16). But suppose a thorn bush be well pruned and cut, and be well taken care

of? Yes, but he will never bear figs; “neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (vv. 17-18). It cannot be but every tree will bring forth fruit according to its own kind. What is then to be done? He tells us, “Make the tree good, and his fruit [will be] good” (Mat 12:33). The root must be dealt with, the nature of the tree changed, or no good fruit will be brought forth.

This is what I aim at: unless a man be regenerate, unless he be a believer, all attempts that he can make for mortification are to no purpose, be they ever so deceptively attractive and promising. All the means he can use are pointless, even if he should follow them with ever so much diligence, earnestness, watchfulness, and intention of mind and spirit. In vain shall he use many remedies; he shall not be healed.

b. Evils upon unbelievers who attempt mortification

Yea, there are various hopeless evils attending an endeavor to perform this duty in convinced persons who are not believers.

1). *Distracted from seeking Christ*

When an unbeliever focuses on mortifying sin, his mind and soul are taken up about that which is not the man’s proper business, and so he is diverted from that which is. God lays hold by His Word and judgments on some sin in him, galls his conscience, disquiets his heart, deprives him of his rest. Now other diversions will not serve his turn; he must apply himself to the work before him. The business in hand is to awake the whole man unto a consideration of the state and condition he is in, that he might be brought home to God. But instead he sets himself to mortify the sin that troubles him—which is a clear result of self-love, to be freed from his trouble—and not at all to the work he is called to, and so is diverted from it. Thus God tells us of the tribe of Ephraim, that He “spread [His] net upon them,” and brought “them down as the fowls of the heaven” and “chastised them” (Hos 7:12)—that is, caught them, entangled them, convinced them that they could not escape. Then God tells us, “They return, but not to the most High” (v. 16)—that is, they set themselves to a relinquishment of sin, but not by universal conversion as God called for it. Thus the most promising efforts men can fix upon for coming to God divert them from coming to Him.

This is one of the most common deceits whereby men ruin their own souls. I wish that some whose trade it is to daub with untempered mortar⁶¹ in the things of God did not teach this deceit and cause the people to err by their ignorance (Eze 13:10-14). What do men do, what often are they directed unto, when their consciences are vexed by sin and disquieted by the Lord Who has laid hold upon them? Is not a practical relinquishment of the sin that they are perplexed with—in some fruits of it—and making head against it the sum of what they apply themselves to? And is not the gospel end of their convictions lost thereby? Here men abide and perish.

2). *False confidence*

This duty is a thing good in itself (in its proper place), a duty evidencing sincerity, bringing home peace to the conscience. Therefore, a man finding himself really engaged in it—his mind and heart set against this or that sin, with purpose and resolution to have no more to do

⁶¹ **daub with untempered mortar** – apply plaster of improperly mixed clay that will not hold up to weather; here refers to irresponsibly encouraging people to attempt mortification before saving faith.

with it—is ready to conclude that his state and condition is good, and so to delude his own soul.

a). *False quieting of the conscience.* However, when his conscience has been made sick with sin and he could find no rest, when he should go to the great Physician of souls and get healing in His blood, the man by this engagement against sin pacifies and quiets his conscience and sits down without going to Christ at all. Ah, how many poor souls are thus deluded to eternity! “When Ephraim saw his sickness...[he] sent to king Jareb” (Hos 5:13), which kept him off from God. The whole bundle of the popish religion is made up of designs and contrivances to pacify the conscience without Christ—all described by the apostle in Romans 10:3.

b). *Self-righteous satisfaction.* By attempting mortification, men satisfy themselves that their state and condition is good, seeing they do that which is a work good in itself and they do not do it to be seen. They know they would have the work done in sincerity, and so are hardened in a kind of self-righteousness.

c). *Giving up.* When a man has thus for a season been deluded and has deceived his own soul, and finds in a long course of life that indeed his sin is not mortified—or if he has changed one sin, he has gotten another—he begins at length to think that all contending is in vain. He thinks he will never be able to prevail, but is only making a dam against water that increases on him. Hereupon he gives over as one despairing of any success and yields up himself to the power of sin and that habit of formality⁶² that he has fallen into.

This is the usual result with persons attempting the mortification of sin without first obtaining an interest in Christ. It deludes them, hardens them, and destroys them. And therefore we see that there are not usually more vile and desperate sinners in the world than such as, having by conviction been put on this course, have found it fruitless and deserted it without a discovery of Christ. And this is the substance of the religion and godliness of the choicest formalists in the world, and of all those who in the Roman “synagogue” are drawn to mortification, as they drive Indians to baptism⁶³ or cattle to water.

I say, then, that mortification is the work of believers, and believers only. To kill sin is the work of living men; where men are dead (as all unbelievers, the best of them, are dead), sin is alive, and will live.

2. Work of Faith

It is 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 who do not have that instrument to attempt the doing of it. It is faith that purifies the heart (Act 15:9); or, as Peter speaks, “ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22). And without it, it will not be done.

⁶² **formality** – outward efforts without a heart for God. See *Formality and Useless Kinds of Religion* by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁶³ **Indians to baptism** – Roman Catholic missionary efforts in India in which they baptized natives to “make” them Christians; RC theology teaches that people are born again when sprinkled with water by a priest; no faith is necessary in that act.

I suppose what has been spoken is sufficient to make good my first general rule: Be sure to get an interest in Christ. If you intend to mortify any sin without it, it will never be done.

3. Objection: What Shall the Unregenerate Do?

You will say, “What then would you have unregenerate men do who are convinced of the evil of sin? Shall they cease striving against sin, live dissolutely,⁶⁴ give their lusts their swing, and be as bad as the worst of men? This would be a way to set the whole world into confusion, to bring all things into darkness, to set open the flood-gates of lust, and lay the reins upon the necks of men to rush into all sin with delight and greediness, like the horse into the battle.”

Answer 1. God forbid (Rom 6:1-2)! It is to be looked on as a great result of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God, that by many ways and means He is pleased to restrain the sons of men from running forth into the range of excess and riot which the depravity of their nature would carry them into with violence. By whatever way this is done, it is a result of the care, kindness, and goodness of God, without which the whole earth would be a hell of sin and confusion.

Answer 2. There is a peculiar convincing power in the Word, which God is oftentimes pleased to put forth, to the wounding, amazing, and in some sort the humbling of sinners, though they are never converted. And the Word is to be preached though it has this end, yet not *with* this end in view. Let, then, the Word be preached and the sins of men will be rebuked, lust will be restrained, and some oppositions will be made against sin, though that be not the effect aimed at.

Answer 3. Though this be the work of the Word and Spirit, and it be good in itself, yet it is not profitable nor availing as to its main end in them in whom it is wrought. They are still in the gall of bitterness and under the power of darkness.

Answer 4. Let men know it is their duty, but in its proper place. I take not men from mortification, but put them upon conversion. He is not his enemy who shall call a man from mending a hole in the wall of his house to quench a fire that is consuming the whole building. Poor soul, it is not your sore finger but your consuming fever, to which you are to apply yourself! You set yourself against a particular sin and do not consider that you are nothing but sin.

4. To Preachers

Let me add this to them who are preachers of the Word or intend that employment through the good hand of God. It is their duty to plead with men about their sins, to lay load on particular sins, but always remember that it be done with that which is the proper end of law and gospel: that is, that they make use of the sin they speak against to discover the state and condition of the sinner. Otherwise, perhaps they may work men to formality and hypocrisy, but little of the true end of preaching the gospel will be brought about. It will not profit to beat a man off from his drunkenness into a sober formality. A skillful master of the assemblies lays his axe at the root and drives still at the heart (Ecc 12:11).

To attack particular sins of ignorant, unregenerate persons, such as the land is full of, is a good work. However, though it may be done with great effectiveness, vigor, and success, if this

⁶⁴ **dissolutely** – without moral restraint.

be the only result of preaching (that is, that they are set upon the most diligent endeavors to mortify the sins preached against), all that is accomplished is but like the beating of an enemy in an open field, and driving him into an impregnable castle, not to be prevailed against. Do you ever gain the advantage [in reproofing] a sinner on the account of any one sin whatever? Do you have anything to take hold of him by? Apply it to his *state* and *condition*, drive it up to the head, and there deal with him. To break men off of particular sins, and not to break their hearts, is to deprive ourselves of advantages in dealing with them.

And herein is the Roman mortification grievously sinful. They drive all sorts of persons to mortifying without the least consideration whether the persons have a principle for it or not. Yea, they are so far from calling on men to believe, so that they may be able to mortify their lusts, that they call men to mortification instead of believing. The truth is: they neither know what it is to believe nor what mortification itself intends. Faith with them is but a general assent to the doctrine taught in their church; and mortification with them is a man's commitment by a vow to some certain course of life wherein he denies himself something of the use of the things of this world, not without a considerable compensation. Such men know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Their boasting of their mortification is but their glorying in their shame.

Some casuists⁶⁵ among ourselves overlook the necessity of regeneration and confidently give this for a direction to all sorts of persons that complain of any sin or lust: that they should vow against it at least for a season, a month or so. These seem to have barely any light in the mystery of the gospel, much like that of Nicodemus when he first came to Christ (Joh 3). They bid men vow to abstain from their sin for a season. This commonly makes their lust more impetuous. Perhaps with great perplexity they keep their word—and perhaps not, which increases their guilt and torment. Is their sin at all mortified hereby? Do they find a conquest over it? Is their condition changed, though they attain a relinquishment of it? Are they not still in the gall of bitterness? Is not this to put men to make brick, if not without straw, yet, which is worse, without strength (Exo 5:7)?

What promise has any unregenerate man to encourage him in this work? What assistance for the performance of it? Can sin be killed without an interest in the death of Christ, or mortified without the Spirit? If such directions should prevail to change men's lives, as seldom they do, yet they never reach to the change of their hearts or conditions. They may make men self-righteous or hypocrites, but not Christians.

It often grieves me to see poor souls who have a zeal for God and a desire of eternal welfare, kept by such directors and directions under a hard, burdensome, outside worship and service of God all their days, with many specious⁶⁶ endeavors for mortification, in an utter ignorance of the righteousness of Christ and unacquaintedness with His Spirit. Persons and things of this kind I know too many. If ever God shine into their hearts to give them the knowledge of His glory in the face of His Son Jesus Christ, they will see the folly of their present way (2Co 4:6).

⁶⁵ **casuists** – theologians and others who study and resolve cases of conscience regarding duty and conduct.

⁶⁶ **specious** – deceptively promising.

Chapter 8

RULES FOR MORTIFICATION

B. Sincerity and Diligence

The second rule for the mortification of sin that I shall propose is this:

B. Without sincerity and diligence in a universal obedience, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained.

The first rule was to the person, that he must be a true believer (ch. 7); this second rule is to the thing itself. I shall a little explain this position.

1. Why Universal Diligence Is Needed

A man finds a lust to bring him into the condition formerly described. It is powerful, strong, and disturbing. It leads captive, vexes, disquiets, and takes away peace. He is not able to bear it; wherefore he sets himself against it, prays against it, groans under it, sighs to be delivered. But in the meantime, in other duties—in constant communion with God; in reading, prayer, and meditation; in other ways that are not of the same kind with the lust wherewith he is troubled—he is loose and negligent. Let not that man think that he shall ever arrive to the mortification of the lust he is perplexed with.

This is a condition that often befalls men in their pilgrimage. The Israelites drew nigh to God under a sense of their sin, with much diligence and earnestness, with fasting and prayer. Many expressions are made of their earnestness in the work, such as, “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” (Isa 58:2). But God rejects all. Their fast (v. 5) is a remedy that will not heal them, and the reason given is because they focused on this one duty only (vv. 5-7). They attended diligently to it, but in others were negligent and careless. He who has a “running sore” (it is the scriptural expression in Psalm 77:2) 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 leaves the general habit of his body in disorder, his labor and travail will be in vain. So will his attempts be that shall endeavor to stop the bloody issue of sin and filth in his soul, and is not equally careful of his universal spiritual temperature and constitution. The reasons for this follow.

2. Reasons for Failure when Focusing on Only One Sin

a. An invalid underlying principle

This kind of endeavor for mortification proceeds from a corrupt principle, ground, and foundation; so that it will never proceed to a good result. The true and acceptable principles of mortification shall be afterward insisted on: hatred of sin as sin (not only as troubling or disquieting) and a sense of the love of Christ in the cross lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification. It is certain that what I speak of proceeds from self-love. You set yourself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify such a lust or sin. What is the reason of it? It disquiets you; it has taken away your peace. It fills your heart with sorrow, trouble, and fear; you have no rest because of it. Yes, but friend, you have neglected prayer or reading; you have been vain and loose in your conduct in other things that have not been of the same nature with that lust wherewith you are perplexed. These are no less sins and evils than those under which you groan. Jesus Christ bled for them also. Why do you not set yourself against them also?

If you hate sin as sin, every evil way, you would be no less watchful against everything that grieves and disquiets the Spirit of God than against that which grieves and disquiets your own soul. It is evident that you contend against sin merely because of your own trouble by it. If your conscience were quiet under it you would let it alone. If it did not disquiet you it should not be disquieted by you. Now, can you think that God will set in with such hypocritical endeavors, so that His Spirit will not bear witness to the treachery and falsehood of your spirit? Do you think He will ease you of that which perplexes you, so that you may be at liberty to do that which no less grieves Him? No. Instead, God says, “Here is one who, 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. God’s work consists in universal obedience. To be freed of one sin’s present perplexity is that man’s work only. Hence is that of the apostle, “Let us cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1). If we will do any one thing, we must do all things. So then, it is not only an intense opposition to this or that 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.

b. Chastening

A second reason to avoid focusing on mortifying only one particular sin is this: How do you know but that God has suffered the lust wherewith you have been perplexed to get strength in you and power over you in order to chasten you for your other negligences and common lukewarmness in walking before Him—at least to awaken you to the consideration of your ways, that you may make a thorough work and change in your course of walking with Him?

The rage and predominance of a particular lust is commonly the fruit and result of a careless, negligent course in general, and that upon a double account.

1). As its natural effect, if I may so say. Lust, as I showed in general, lies in the heart of everyone, even the best, while he lives. Think not that the Scripture speaks in vain that it is subtle, cunning, crafty; that it seduces, entices, fights, rebels (Jer 17:9). While a man keeps a diligent watch over his heart, which is sin’s root and fountain; while above all keepings he keeps his heart, from whence are the issues of life and death (Pro 4:23)—then lust withers and

dies in it. But if through negligence lust makes an eruption in a particular way, gets a passage to the thoughts by the affections, and from them and by them perhaps breaks out into open sin in the life, then the strength of sin follows the way it has found out, and that way mainly it urges until, having got a passage, it then vexes, 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 might easily have been prevented by a strict and universal watch.

2). God's use of one sin to chasten another. As I said, God often suffers one sin to break out in order to chasten our negligence. 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 (Rom 1:26). This is so even with His own. He may, He does, leave them sometimes to some distressing condition, either 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 (2Co 12:7). 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 prevalence, that God oftentimes suffers it so to prevail—at least in order to admonish us and humble us, and 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—so that the particular lust should be mortified while the general course be unreformed?

He, then, that would really, 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, though but one lust is burdensome to him (Isa 43:24). While there abides a treachery in the heart to indulge any negligence in not pressing universally to all perfection in obedience, the soul is weak, as not giving faith its whole work; and the soul is selfish, as considering more the trouble of sin than the filth and guilt of it. The soul then lives under a constant provocation of God, so that it may not expect any comfortable result in any spiritual duty that it undertakes—much less in this under consideration, which requires another principle and frame of spirit for its accomplishment.

Chapter 9

PREPARATORY DIRECTIONS

Dangerous Symptoms

For the practical aspects of mortification of sin, we are considering three main heads:

- I. What it is to mortify any sin, and that both negatively (ch. 5) and positively (ch. 6), that we be not mistaken in the foundation.
- II. *General* rules without which it will be utterly impossible for anyone to get any sin truly and spiritually mortified (ch. 7 and 8).
- III. *Particular* directions and actions whereby this is to be done.⁶⁷

Now we come to the third head. Having considered the foregoing general rules, we will now propose particular directions to the soul for its guidance when under a disquieting lust or distemper, being the main thing I aim at. Now, of these some are previous and preparatory, and in some of them the work itself is contained.⁶⁸ Of the first sort are the following.

1. Consider Dangerous Symptoms

The first direction is this:

Consider if your lust has dangerous symptoms attending or accompanying it: whether it has any deadly mark on it or not.

If it has, extraordinary remedies are to be used; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it. You will say, “What are these dangerous marks and symptoms, the desperate attendants of an indwelling lust that you intend?” Some of them I shall name as follows.

a. Inveterateness⁶⁹

Your distemper is dangerous if your lust has lain long corrupting in your heart, if you have suffered it to abide in power and prevalence, without attempting vigorously the killing of it and the healing of the wounds you have received by it for some long season. Have you permitted worldliness, ambition, or greediness of study to eat up other duties, the duties wherein you ought to hold constant communion with God, for some long season? Or uncleanness to defile your heart with vain, foolish, and wicked imaginations for many days? If so, your lust has a dangerous symptom.

⁶⁷ This opening is adapted from chapter five by the editors in order to assist the reader.

⁶⁸ Chapters 9-13 are devoted to considering nine vital “preparatory” directions. Chapter 14 then presents directions for the actual accomplishment of mortification.

⁶⁹ **inveterateness** – obstinacy confirmed by time.

So was the case with David: “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness” (Psa 38:5). When a lust has lain 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 gradually make its way more or less into all the faculties of the soul, and make the affections comfortable with its company and society. It grows familiar to the mind and conscience so that they do not startle at it as a strange thing, but are bold with it as that to which they are accustomed. It will get such advantage by this means as oftentimes to exert and put forth itself without having any notice taken of it at all, as it seems to have been with Joseph in his swearing by the life of Pharaoh (Gen 42:15-16). Unless some extraordinary course be taken, such a person has no ground in the world to expect that his latter end shall be peace.

For, *first*, 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 (Rom 6)? *Secondly*, how can he promise himself that it shall ever be otherwise with him, or that his lust will cease disturbing and seducing, when he sees it fixed and abiding, having done so for many days and having gone through a variety of conditions with him? It may be the sin has been tested by mercies and afflictions, and those possibly so remarkable that the soul could not avoid taking special notice of them. It may be it has weathered out many a storm and passed under much variety of gifts in the administration of the Word. It never proves an easy thing to dislodge a resident who is pleading title to a property after long dwelling there. Old neglected wounds are often mortal, and always dangerous. Indwelling distempers grow rusty and stubborn by continuance in ease and quiet. Lust is such a resident as, if it can plead time and some right by length of occupation, will not easily be ejected. As it never dies of itself, so if it be not daily killed it will always gather strength.

b. Secret pleas

Secret pleas of the heart for its own defense, and to keep up its peace—notwithstanding the abiding of a lust, without a vigorous gospel attempt for its mortification—is another dangerous symptom of a deadly distemper in the heart. Now, there are several ways whereby this may be done, and I shall name some of them.

1). Searching for the good instead of mortifying the sin

It is a dangerous symptom of a deadly lust in the heart when a man has perplexing thoughts about sin, and instead of applying himself to the destruction of it, he searches his heart to see what evidences he can find of a good condition, notwithstanding that sin and lust, so that it may go well with him.

For a man to gather up his experiences of God—to call them to mind, to collect, consider, try, and improve them—is an excellent thing. It is a duty practiced by all the saints and commended in the Old Testament and the New. This was David’s work when he communed with his own heart and called to remembrance the former loving-kindness of the Lord (Psa 77:6-9). This is the duty that Paul sets us to practice (2Co 13:5). As it is in itself excellent, so it has beauty added to it by a proper season of self-examination during a time of trial, temptation, or disquietness of the heart about sin. It is a picture of silver to set off this golden apple, as Solomon speaks (Pro 25:11).

But to do it in order to satisfy conscience, which cries and calls for another purpose, 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 disentangle himself from under the yoke that God was putting on his neck, his condition is very dangerous, his wound hardly curable. Thus the Jews, under the convictions 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 (Joh 8:39), and so countenanced themselves in all abominable wickedness to their utter ruin.

This is, in some degree, a blessing of a man's self, and saying that upon one account or other he shall have peace, although he adds “drunkenness to thirst” (Deu 29:19). Love of sin and undervaluation of peace and of all tastes of love from God, are wrapped in such a frame. Such a one plainly shows that, if he can but keep up hope of escaping the “wrath to come” (Mat 3:7), he can be well content to be unfruitful in the world, at any distance from God that is not final separation. What is to be expected from such a heart?

2). Applying grace to an unmortified sin

This deceit is carried on by applying grace and mercy to an unmortified sin, or one not sincerely endeavored to be mortified. 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 (2Ki 5:18), saying in effect, “In all other things I will walk with God; but in this thing, God be merciful unto me”—his condition is sad.

It is true, indeed, that a man's being resolved to indulge himself in any sin on the account of mercy seems to be, and doubtless in any course is, altogether inconsistent with Christian sincerity—and is a badge of a hypocrite, and is the “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 1:4). Yet I doubt not but, through the craft of Satan and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be ensnared with this deceit 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 upon the account of grace and every word that is spoken of mercy. It stands ready to catch at and to pervert mercy to its own corrupt aims and purposes. To apply mercy, then, to a sin not vigorously mortified is to fulfil the end of the flesh upon the gospel.

These and many other ways and wiles a deceitful heart will sometimes make use of to comfort 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, and though his will be not wholly set upon it, yet he has an imperfect velleity⁷⁰ towards it—he would practice it were it not for such and such considerations, and hereupon relieves himself in other ways than by the mortification and pardon of it in the blood of Christ. That man's “wounds stink and are corrupt” (Psa 38:5), and he will, without speedy deliverance, be at the door of death.

⁷⁰ **velleity** – mere wish, unaccompanied by any effort to attain it.

c. Frequent success

Frequency of success in sin's seduction, in obtaining the prevailing consent of the will unto it, is another dangerous symptom. This is what I mean: When the sin spoken of gets the consent of the will with some delight, even though it be not actually outwardly acted upon, yet it has success. Upon outward considerations a man may not be able to go along with sin to that which James calls the "finishing" of it (Jam 1:14-15) in outward acts of sin; yet, when the *will* of sinning may be actually obtained, then, I say, it has success. Now, if any lust be able thus far to prevail in the soul of any man, as his condition may possibly be very bad and himself be unregenerate, so it cannot possibly be very good, but dangerous.

And it is all the same whether this falling into sin be done by the choice of the will or carelessly, for even carelessness is chosen, in a manner of speaking. When we are careless and negligent in areas where we are obligated to watchfulness and carefulness, that carelessness does not reduce the voluntariness of what we do; for although men do not choose and resolve to be negligent and careless, yet if they choose the things that will make them so, they choose carelessness itself—because a thing may be chosen by choosing the cause of it. Let not men think that the evil of their hearts is in any measure excused because they seem for the most part to be surprised into that consent which they seem to give unto it; for it is negligence of their duty in watching over their hearts that betrays them into that surprisal.⁷¹

d. Legal arguments

When a man fights against his sin only with arguments from the consequences or punishment due unto it, this is a sign that sin has taken great possession of the will and that in the heart there is a "superfluity"⁷² of naughtiness" (Jam 1:21). Such a man who does not oppose the seduction of sin and lust in his heart except for fear of shame among men or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do the sin if there were no punishment attending it. How this differs from living in the practice of sin I know not!

Those who are Christ's and act in their obedience upon gospel principles have the death of Christ, the love of God, the detestable nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, and a deep-grounded abhorrence of sin as sin to oppose to any seduction of sin, to all the workings, strivings, and fightings of lust in their hearts. Joseph acted in this way: he said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"—that is, my good and gracious Lord (Gen 39:9). And so did Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth"⁷³ us" (2Co 5:14); and, "Having [received] these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2Co 7:1). But now, if a man be so under the power of his lust that he has nothing but law to oppose it with—if he cannot fight against it with gospel weapons, but deals with it altogether with hell and judgment, which are the proper arms of the Law—it is most evident that sin has possessed his will and affections to a very great prevalence and conquest.

Such a person has cast off, as to the particular spoken of, the conduct of renewing grace, and is kept from ruin only by restraining grace;⁷⁴ and to the degree he is so, he is fallen from

⁷¹ **surprisal** – being taken by surprise.

⁷² **superfluity of naughtiness** – overflow of wickedness.

⁷³ **constraineth us** – causes us to act.

⁷⁴ **renewing grace...restraining grace** – Renewing grace is life-giving, fruit-bearing power God gives His people through the Spirit; restraining grace merely keeps men from sin.

grace and is returned under the power of the Law. And can it be thought that this is not a great provocation to Christ, that men should cast off His easy, gentle yoke and rule (Mat 11:29-30) and cast themselves under the iron yoke of the Law merely out of indulgence to their lusts?

Try yourself by this also: When you are driven by sin to make a stand, so that you must either serve it and rush at the command of it into folly, like the horse into the battle, or stand against it to suppress it, what do you say to your soul? How do you argue with yourself? Is this all: “Hell will be the end of this course; vengeance will meet with me and find me out”? It is time for you to look about yourself; evil lies at the door (Gen 4:7). Paul’s main argument to convince that sin shall not have dominion over believers is that they “are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). If your contention against sin be all on legal accounts, from legal principles and motives, what assurance can you have that sin shall not have dominion over you, which will be your ruin?

Yea, know that this reserve will not long hold out. If your lust has driven you from stronger gospel forts, it will speedily prevail against this also. Do not suppose that such considerations will deliver you, when you have voluntarily given up to your enemy those helps and means of preservation which have a thousand times their strength. Rest assuredly in this: that unless you recover yourself with speed from this condition, the thing that you fear will come upon you. What gospel principles do not do, legal motives cannot do.

e. Sense of punishment

Another dangerous symptom is when it is probable that there is, or may be, some judiciary hardness,⁷⁵ or at least chastening punishment, in the lust that is distressing you. That God sometimes leaves 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, I no way doubt. Hence was that complaint of the church: “Why hast thou...hardened our heart from thy fear?” (Isa 63:17). That this is His way of dealing with unregenerate men no man questions.

But how shall a man know whether there be anything of God’s chastening hand in his being left to the evil effects of his condition? Answer: 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 about? Have you been negligent in duties? Have you lived inordinately to yourself? Is there the guilt of any great sin lying upon you unrepented of? A new sin may be permitted, as well as a new affliction sent, to bring an old sin to remembrance.

Have you received any eminent mercy, protection, or deliverance that you did not make good use of in a right manner, nor were thankful for? Or have you been exercised with any affliction without laboring to apply what God intended for it? Or have you been negligent of the opportunities for glorifying God in your generation that, in His good providence, He had graciously afforded to you? Or have you conformed yourself to the world and the men of it, through the abounding of temptations in the days wherein you live? If you find this to have been your state, awake, call upon God. You are fast asleep in a storm of God’s anger round about you!

⁷⁵ **judiciary hardness** – severe punishment from God in which He is said to harden the hearts of men in their sins and to their ruin.

f. Resisting chastening

A final dangerous symptom of lust or sin is when it has already withstood particular dealings from God against it. This condition is described: “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly⁷⁶ in the way of his heart” (Isa 57:17). God had dealt with them about their prevailing lust, and that in several ways by affliction and desertion; but they held out against all. This is a sad condition, which nothing but mere sovereign grace⁷⁷ (as God expresses it in the next verse) can relieve a man in, and which no man ought to promise himself or bear himself upon.

In His providential actions, God oftentimes 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, or sickness that he is in or under. Sometimes in reading of the Word God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart and shakes him as to his present condition. More frequently He meets with men in the hearing of the Word preached, His great ordinance for conviction, conversion, and edification. God often hews men by the sword of His Word in that ordinance, strikes directly on their bosom-beloved lust, startles the sinner, and makes him engage unto the mortification and relinquishment of the evil of his heart. Now, if his lust has taken such hold on him as to force him to break these bands of the Lord, and to cast these cords from him; if it overcomes these convictions and gets again into its old posture; if it can cure the wounds it so receives—that soul is in a sad condition.

Unspeakable are the evils that attend such a frame of heart. Every particular warning to a man in such a state is an inestimable mercy. How then does he despise God when he holds out against them! 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 (Heb 3:11)!

g. A caution

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 goeth not out but by fasting and prayer” (Mat 17:21), so say I of lusts of this kind. An ordinary course of mortification will not do it; extraordinary ways must be used. This is the first particular direction: Consider whether the lust or sin you are contending with has any of these dangerous symptoms attending it.

Before I proceed, I must give you one caution by the way, lest any be deceived by what has been spoken. Whereas I say the things and evils above-mentioned may befall true believers, let not anyone who finds the same things in himself conclude that he is a true believer. These are the evils that believers may fall into and be ensnared with, not the things that *constitute* a believer. A man may as well conclude that he is a believer because he is an adulterer, since David fell into adultery as a believer, as conclude it from the signs previously mentioned, which are the evils of sin and Satan in the hearts of believers.

The seventh chapter of Romans contains the description of a regenerate man. He that shall consider what is spoken of a believer’s dark side, of the unregenerate part, of the indwelling power and violence of sin remaining in him, and, because he finds the like in himself, con-

⁷⁶ **frowardly** – stubbornly; backsliding or turning away.

⁷⁷ **sovereign grace** – God’s unmerited favor freely shown according to His will, as by a king (Rom 9:15-18).

clude that he is a regenerate man, will be deceived in his reckoning. It is the same as if you should argue: A wise man may be sick and wounded, yea, do some things foolishly; therefore, everyone who is sick and wounded and does things foolishly is a wise man. Or as if a foolish person, hearing one speak of a beautiful person that had a mark or a scar which much disfigured him, should conclude that because he himself has scars, moles, and warts, he also is beautiful. If you will have evidences of your being believers, it must be from those things that constitute men to be believers. He that has these dangerous symptoms in himself may safely conclude, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one." When any man is so, he must look for other evidences if he will have peace about salvation.

Chapter 10

PREPARATORY DIRECTIONS

Clear Sense of Sin

2. Get a Clear Sense of Your Sin

The second direction for the mortification of sin in believers 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. Understand the guilt of your sin

1). Enormous guilt

It is one of the deceits of a prevailing lust to lessen its own guilt in our minds. “Is it not a little one?” (Gen 19:20); “When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing” (2Ki 5:18)—as if to say, Though this be bad, yet it is not so bad as such and such an evil; others of the people of God have had such a frame; yea, what dreadful actual sins have some of them fallen into! Innumerable ways there are whereby sin diverts the mind from a right and due apprehension of its guilt. Its injurious effects darken the mind, so that it cannot make a right judgment of things. Perplexing reasonings, extenuating promises, disorderly desires, insincere purposes to forsake, hopes of mercy—all have their share in disturbing the mind in its consideration of the guilt of a prevailing lust. The prophet tells us that lust will do thus wholly when it comes to its height: “Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart” (Hos 4:11)—the heart, that is, the understanding, as it is often used in the Scripture.

And as lusts accomplish this work to the height in unregenerate persons, so in part in regenerate also. Solomon tells you of him who was enticed by the lewd woman, that he was “among the simple ones”; he was “a young man void of understanding” (Pro 7:7). And wherein did his folly appear? Why, he says, he “knoweth not that it is for his life” (v. 23); he considered not the guilt of the evil that he was involved in. And the Lord, rendering a reason why His dealings with Ephraim took no better effect, gives this account: “Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart” (Hos 7:11)—that is, he had no understanding of his own miserable condition. It would have been impossible for David to have lain so long in the guilt of his abominable sin, but that he had innumerable corrupt reasonings hindering him from taking a clear view of its ugliness and guilt in the glass of the Law. This made the prophet that was sent for his awaking, in his dealings with him, to shut up all evasions and pretenses by his parable, so that he might fall fully under a sense of the guilt of it (2Sa 12:7). This is the expected result of lust in the heart: it darkens the mind that it shall not judge aright of its guilt.

And it has many other ways for its own excusing which I shall not now insist on. Let this, then, be the first care of him that would mortify sin: to fix a right judgment of its guilt in his mind.

2). How to understand your guilt

In order to a right judgment of your guilt, take these considerations to your assistance.

a). Guilt heightened by grace received

Though the power of sin is weakened by inherent⁷⁸ grace in them that have it, so that sin shall not have dominion over them as it has over others, yet the guilt of sin that still abides and remains is aggravated and heightened by that grace. “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, that are dead?”—the emphasis is on the word *we*. How shall we do it, who, as he afterward describes it, have received grace from Christ to the contrary? That is, we, doubtless, are more evil than any if we do it. I shall not insist on the special aggravations of the sins of such persons—how they sin against more love, mercy, grace, assistance, relief, means, and deliverances than others. But let this consideration abide in your mind: there is inconceivably more evil and guilt in the evil of your heart that remains, than there would be in so much sin if you had no grace at all.

b). Realize what God sees

Observe that, as God sees abundance of beauty and excellence in the desires of the heart of His servants—more than in any of the most glorious works of other men; yea, more than in most of their own outward performances, which have a greater mixture of sin than the desires and pantings of grace in the heart have—so God sees a great deal of evil in the working of lust in their hearts. Yes, He sees more evil in their lusts than in the open, notorious acts of wicked men, or in many outward sins whereinto the saints may fall—seeing that there is more opposition made against them, and more humiliation generally follows them. Thus Christ, dealing with His decaying children, goes to the root with them, laying aside their profession: “I know thy works” (Rev 3:15). That is, I know *you*: you are quite another thing than you profess, and this makes you abominable.

So, then, let these things, and the like considerations, lead you to a clear sense of the guilt of your indwelling lust, that there may be no room in your heart for lessening or excusing those thoughts by which sin insensibly will get strength and prevail.

b. Consider the danger of your sin

Consider the danger of your sin, which has many aspects.

1). Being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness

Sin hardens us by its deceitfulness. This the apostle sorely charges on the Hebrews: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:12-13). “Take heed”—that is, use all means, consider your temptations, watch diligently. There is a treachery, a deceit, in sin that tends to the hardening of your hearts toward the fear of God.

⁷⁸ **inherent** – indwelling.

The hardening here mentioned is to the utmost: utter impenitence. Sin tends to it, and every corruption and lust will make at least some progress towards it. You that were tender and used to melt under the Word and under afflictions, will grow—as some have spoken—“sermon-proof and sickness-proof.” You that trembled at the presence of God, thoughts of death, and appearance before Him, when you had more assurance of His love than you have now, shall have a stubbornness upon your spirit so as not to be moved by these things. Your soul and your sin shall be spoken of and spoken to, and you shall not be at all concerned, but shall be able to pass over duties (such as praying, hearing, and reading), and your heart be not in the least affected. Sin will grow a light thing to you. You treat it as if it were nothing. This it will grow to.

And what will be the end of such a condition? Can a sadder thing befall you? Is it not enough to make any heart to tremble, to think of being brought into that state in which he will have slight thoughts of sin? Slight thoughts of grace, of mercy, of the blood of Christ, of the Law, heaven, and hell come all in at the same season. Take heed, this is that which your lust is 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). *Some great correction*

Consider the danger of some great temporal correction, which the Scripture calls “judgment,” or just vengeance and punishment (Psa 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.⁷⁹ Though He pardon and forgive, He will take vengeance of your inventions. Oh, remember David and all his troubles! Look on him flying into the wilderness, and consider the hand of God upon him. Is it nothing to you that God should kill your child in anger, ruin your estate in anger, break your bones in anger, suffer you to be a scandal and reproach in anger, kill you, destroy you, make you to lie down in darkness—all in anger? Is it nothing that He should punish, ruin, and undo others because of you? Let me not be misunderstood: I do not mean that God sends all these things always on His people in 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 fear not these things, I fear you are under hardness from your sins.

3). *Loss of peace and strength*

Consider the loss of peace and strength all a man’s 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, and if we have not some strength to walk with Him? Now, an unmortified lust certainly will deprive men’s souls of both these. This case is so evident in David as that nothing can be more clear. How often does he complain that his bones were broken, his soul disquieted, and his wounds grievous on this account! Take other instances: “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth...I hid me” (Isa 57:17). What peace, I pray, is there to a soul while God hides Himself; or what strength while He smites? “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their

⁷⁹ See *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod* by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

offence, and seek my face” (Hos 5:15). That is, I will leave them, hide My face; and what will become of their peace and strength then?

If ever, therefore, 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 ever have mourned in your prayer 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. Possibly you may never see a quiet hour while you live, so that you may carry about 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 sore shall run in the night season and your soul shall refuse comfort (Psa 77:2); so that you shall wish death rather than life; yea, so that your soul might choose strangling. 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. Accustom your heart to thoughts hereof; let it know what is likely to be the outcome of this condition. Leave not this consideration until you have made your soul to tremble within you.

4). *Eternal destruction*

There is the danger of eternal destruction. For the due management of this consideration, observe the following.

a). Connection between continuance in sin and destruction

There is such a connection between a continuance in sin and eternal destruction that, though God does resolve to deliver some from a continuance in sin so they may not be destroyed, yet He will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin—so that while anyone lies under an abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God are to be held out to him. This is the rule of God’s proceeding: If any man “depart” from Him, to “draw back” through unbelief, God’s “soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb 3:12; 10:38); that is, His indignation shall pursue him to destruction (Gal 6:8).

b). No confidence in deliverance from destruction

He who is so entangled under the power of any corruption as above described, can have at present no clear prevailing evidence of his interest in the covenant, by the efficacy whereof he may be delivered from fear of destruction. The result is that destruction from the Lord may justly be a terror to him. He may, he ought, to look upon it as that which will be the end of his course and ways.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). True, but who shall have the comfort of this assertion? Who may assume it to himself? They “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” But you will say, “Is not this to persuade men to unbelief?” I answer: No. There is a twofold judgment that a man may make of himself: first of his person, and secondly of his ways. It is the judgment of his ways, not his person, that I speak of. Let a man get the best evidence for his person that he can, yet to judge that the end of an evil way will be destruction is his duty; not to do it is atheism.

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 those evidences. There is a twofold condemnation of a man's self. First, in respect of what it deserves, when the soul concludes that it deserves to be cast out of the presence of God; and this is so far from a business of unbelief that it is an effect of faith. Secondly, with respect to the result and event, when the soul concludes it shall be damned. I do not say this is the duty of anyone, nor do I call them to it; but this I say: the end of the sinful way wherein a man is ought by him to be concluded to be death that he may be provoked to fly from it. And this is another consideration that ought to dwell upon such a soul, if it desire to be freed from the entanglement of its lusts.

c. Consider the evils of your sin

Consider the evils of your sin. I mean its present evils. Danger concerns what is to come; evil concerns what is present. Some of the many evils that attend an unmortified lust may be mentioned.

1). *It grieves the holy and blessed Spirit* Who is given to believers to dwell in them and abide with them. So, the apostle, exhorting them against many lusts and sins (Eph 4:25-29), gives this as the great motive of it: "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (v. 30). That is, grieve not that Spirit of God whereby you receive so many and great benefits; of which he instances⁸⁰ one signal⁸¹ and comprehensive one: "sealed unto the day of redemption." The Holy Spirit is grieved by it. As a tender and loving friend is grieved at the unkindness of his friend, of whom he has deserved only good, so is it with this tender and loving Spirit, Who has 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 together with Him. "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve" us (Lam 3:33); and shall we daily grieve Him? Thus is He said sometimes to be "vexed," sometimes "grieved at his heart," to express the greatest sense of our provocation (Isa 63:10; Gen 6:6).

Now, if there be anything of gracious honesty 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 you are, Who the Spirit is that is grieved, what He has done for you, what He comes to your soul about, what He has already done in you—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: that the blessed Spirit, Who has undertaken to dwell in them, is continually considering what they entertain in their hearts, and rejoices 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, 14). And is it not a high aggravation when a lust is countenanced in the heart, or suffered to abide there; when it is (as it must be, if we are believers) entertained under the peculiar eye and view of the Holy Ghost, Who is taking care to preserve His tabernacle as 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. Just as totally forsaking Christ through the

⁸⁰ **instances** – gives an example of.

⁸¹ **signal** – remarkable in degree; noteworthy.

deceitfulness of sin is to “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6), 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, so that he shall labor in the fire and not be honored with any success or doing any work for God. The like may 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, how useless, are they for the most part! Among the many reasons that may be assigned for this sad state, it justly may be feared that this is none of the least effectual: many men harbor spirit-devouring lusts in their bosoms, which 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 by this means. As to any success, God blasts such men’s undertakings.

This, then, is my second direction, and it regards the opposition that is to be made to lust in respect of its habitual residence in the soul. Keep alive upon your heart these or the like considerations of its guilt, danger, and evil. Be much in the meditation of these things; cause your heart to dwell and abide upon them. Engage your thoughts in 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 to tremble!

Chapter 11

PREPARATORY DIRECTIONS

Five Others

3. Load Your Conscience with the Guilt of Sin

This is my third direction for the mortification of sin:

Load your conscience with the guilt of it. Not only consider that it has guilt, but load your conscience with the guilt of its actual eruptions and disturbances.

For the right improvement of this rule, I shall give some particular directions.

a. Begin with general aspects of your guilt

Take God's method in it and begin with general aspects, and then descend to particular aspects.

1). Guilt from the holiness of the Law

Charge your conscience with the guilt that appears in it from the righteousness and holiness of the Law. Bring the holy Law of God into your conscience, lay your corruption to it, pray that you may be affected with it. Consider the holiness, spirituality, fiery severity, inwardness, absoluteness of the Law, and see how you can stand before it. Be much, I say, in affecting your conscience with the terror of the Lord in the Law, and how righteous it is that every one of your transgressions should receive a just punishment.⁸²

Perhaps your conscience will invent shifts and evasions to keep off the power of this consideration—such as, that the condemning power of the Law does not belong to you, that you are set free from it, and the like—and so, though you have not fulfilled the Law, yet you need not to be so much troubled by it. However,

a). Tell your conscience that it cannot manage any evidence to the purpose that you are free from the condemning power of sin while your unmortified lust lies in your heart; because, perhaps, the Law may make good its plea against you for a full dominion, and then you are a lost creature. Wherefore it is best to ponder to the utmost what it has to say.

Some plead in the most secret reserve of their hearts that they are freed from the condemning power of the Law. They do this in order to secretly countenance themselves in giving small allowances to sins and lusts. Those who do so are surely not able, on gospel grounds, to manage any evidence unto any tolerable spiritual security that indeed they are in a due manner freed from what they so pretend to be delivered.

⁸² See *Holiness* by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), *The Law and the Saint* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952), and *A Just God* (gospel tract) by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892); all available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

b). Whatever be the issue, yet the Law has commission from God to seize upon transgressors wherever it finds them, and so bring them before His throne, where they are to plead for themselves. This is your present case: the Law has found you out, and it will bring you before God. If you can plead a pardon, well and good; if not, the Law will do its work.

c). However, this is the proper work of the Law: to reveal the guilt of sin, to awaken and humble the soul for it, to be a glass to represent sin in its colors. If you refuse to deal with it on this account, it is not through faith, but through the hardness of your heart and the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a door at which too many professors have gone out unto open apostasy.⁸³ Such a deliverance from the Law they have pretended, as that they would consult its guidance and direction no more; they would measure their sin by it no more. By little and little, this principle has insensibly, from the notion of it, proceeded to influence their practical understandings and, having taken possession there, has turned the will and affections loose to all manner of abominations.

By such ways as these, then, persuade your conscience to hearken diligently to what the Law speaks, in the name of the Lord, unto you about your lust and corruption. Oh, if your ears be open, it will speak with a voice that shall make you tremble, that shall cast you to the ground and fill you with astonishment. If ever you will mortify your corruptions, you must tie up your conscience to the Law and shut it from all shifts and exceptions until it owns its guilt with a clear and thorough apprehension—so that thence, as David speaks, your iniquity may ever be before you (Psa 51:3).

2). *Guilt from gospel light*

Bring your lust to the gospel, not for relief, but for further conviction of its guilt. Look on Him Whom you have pierced, and be in bitterness (Zec 12:10). Say to your soul, “What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on! Is this the return I make to the Father for His love, to the Son for His blood, to the Holy Ghost for His grace? Do I repay the Lord in such a way? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the blessed Spirit has chosen to dwell in? And can I keep myself out of the dust?

“What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How shall I hold up my head with any boldness before Him? Do I account 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 salvation (Heb 2:3)? 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 so that I might behold His face, and then provoke Him to His face? Was my soul washed so that room might be made for new defilements? Shall I endeavor to disappoint the purpose of the death of Christ? Shall I daily grieve that Spirit whereby I am sealed to the day of redemption?”

Entertain your conscience daily with this entreaty. See if it can stand before this aggravation of its guilt. If this make it not soften and sink in some measure, I fear your case is dangerous.

⁸³ **apostasy** – abandoning the faith one had professed.

b. After general aspects of guilt, focus on the particulars

Now descend to particulars. Just as, under the general head of the gospel, all the benefits of it are to be considered, such as redemption, justification, and the like; so, in particular, consider the management of the love of them towards your own soul, for the aggravation of the guilt of your corruption. As,

1). *The infinite patience of God*

Consider the infinite patience and forbearance of God toward 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 forever. Consider 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 are now in pursuit of—and yet He has spared you from time to time, although you seem boldly to have put Him to the test to see how long He could hold out. And will you yet sin against Him? Will you yet weary Him, and make Him to serve with your corruptions (Isa 43:24)?

Have you not often been ready to conclude that it was utterly impossible that He should bear any longer with you; that He would cast you off and be gracious no more; that all His forbearance was exhausted, and hell and wrath was prepared for you? And yet, above all your expectation, He has returned with visitations of love—and will you yet abide in the provocation of the eyes of His glory?

2). *The recovering grace of God*

How often have you been at the door of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and, by the infinite, rich grace of God, have been recovered to communion with Him again?

Have you not found grace decaying; delight vanishing in duties, ordinances, prayer, and meditation; inclinations to loose, careless walking thriving; and they who before were entangled, almost beyond recovery? Have you not found yourself engaged in such ways, societies, and companies as God abhors—and that with delight? And will you venture any more to the brink of hardness?

3). *All God's gracious dealings*

All God's gracious dealings with you in providential dispensations, deliverances, afflictions, mercies, enjoyments—all ought here to take a place. By these and the like means, I say, load your conscience. Leave not this undertaking until your conscience be thoroughly affected with the guilt of your indwelling corruption—until it is sensible of its wound and lies in the dust before the Lord. Unless this be done to the purpose, all other endeavors are to no purpose. While the conscience has any means to alleviate the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt its mortification.

4. Constantly Long for Deliverance

My fourth direction for the mortification of sin is:

Being thus affected with your sin, in the next place get a constant longing and breathing after deliverance from the power of it.

Suffer not your heart one moment to be contented with your present frame and condition. In things natural and civil, longing desires after anything are of no value or consideration any

further than as they incite and stir up the person (in whom they are) to a diligent use of means for the bringing about the thing aimed at. In spiritual things it is otherwise. Longing, breathing, and panting after deliverance is a grace in itself, which 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 at work: “vehement desire” (2Co 7:11). And in this case of indwelling sin and the power of it, what frame does he express himself to be in? His heart breaks out with longings into a most passionate expression of desire for deliverance (Rom 7:24). Now, if this be the frame of saints upon the general consideration of indwelling sin, how is it to be heightened and increased when added to it is the perplexing rage and power of any particular lust and corruption! Assure yourself, unless you long for deliverance, you shall not have it.

This will make the heart watchful for all opportunities of advantage against its enemy, and ready to close with any assistance that is afforded for its destruction. Strong desires are the very life of that “praying always” which is enjoined us in all conditions (Eph 6:18), and in none is more necessary than in this. They set faith and hope at work, and are the soul’s moving after the Lord.

Get your heart, then, into a panting and breathing frame: long, sigh, cry out. You know the example of David (Psa 38, 42, etc.). I shall not need to dwell anymore upon it.

5. Consider Your Particular Temperament

The fifth direction for the mortification of your sin is:

Consider whether the distemper with which you are perplexed be not rooted in your nature, and cherished, encouraged, and heightened from your constitution.

A propensity to some sins may doubtless lie in the natural temperament and disposition of men. In this case, consider the following.

a. Not a lessening of your guilt

This is not in the least a lessening of the guilt of your sin. Some, with an open contempt for God, will ascribe gross enormities to their natural temperament 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,⁸⁴ when our natures originally fell into depravity, that the instigation and nourishment of any sin abides in our natural temper. David reckons his being shaped in iniquity and conception in sin (Psa 51:5) as an aggravation of his following sin, not a lessening or excusing of it. That you are peculiarly inclined to any sinful distemper is but a peculiar breaking out of original lust in your nature, which should peculiarly humble you.

b. Greater threat

In reference to your walking with God, what you have to fix upon is that so great an advantage is given to sin, as also to Satan, by your temperament and disposition that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence they will assuredly prevail against your soul.

⁸⁴ **Fall** – The entire human race fell from the blessings of God’s presence into the condition and curse of sin and death when Adam violated God’s command in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-6).

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. Bringing the body into subjection

For the mortification of any distemper so rooted in the nature of a man, unto all other ways and means already named (or further to be insisted on), there is one expedient peculiarly suited: this is that of the apostle, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27). The bringing of the very body into subjection is an ordinance of God tending to the mortification of sin. This gives check to the natural root of the distemper, and withers it by taking away its fatness of soil.

The papists—men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, the work of His Spirit, and the whole business in hand—have laid the whole weight and stress of mortification in voluntary services and penances, leading to the subjection of the body, knowing indeed the true nature neither of sin nor mortification. Perhaps because of this, it may be a temptation to others to neglect some means of humiliation that are owned and appointed by God Himself. The bringing of the body into subjection in the case insisted on, by cutting short the natural appetite—by fasting, watching, and the like—is doubtless acceptable to God, as long as it is done with the following limitations.

1). Not good in itself

The outward weakening and impairing of the body should not be looked upon as a thing good in itself, or as if any mortification is actually contained in it—such would again bring us under carnal ordinances. It should be looked upon only as a means for the end proposed: the weakening of any distemper in its natural root and seat. A man may have leanness of both body and soul together.

2). Not able to produce mortification by itself

The means whereby bodily subjection is to be done—namely, by fasting, watching, and the like—should not be looked upon as things that in themselves, and by virtue of their own power, can produce true mortification of any sin. If they could, sin might be mortified without any help of the Spirit in any unregenerate person in the world. They are to be looked upon only as ways whereby the Spirit may, and sometimes does, put forth strength for the accomplishing of His own work, especially in the case mentioned. Lack of a right understanding and due use of these and the like considerations, has raised a mortification among the papists that may be better applied to horses and other beasts of the field, than to believers.

This is the sum of what has been spoken: If the distemper complained of seems to be rooted in the natural temperament and constitution, then when applying our souls to a participation of the blood and Spirit of Christ, we must labor in God’s way to restrain the natural root of that distemper.

6. Watch against Sin’s Advantages

The sixth direction for mortification is:

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: “I say unto all, Watch” (Mar 13:37); which in Luke 24:34 is, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged”—that is, watch against all eruptions of your corruptions. I mean here the duty that David professed himself to be exercised unto. “I have,” he said, “kept myself from mine iniquity” (2Sa 22:24). He watched all the ways and workings of his iniquity, to prevent them and 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, and what conditions have at any time given, or do usually give, advantages to your distempers, and set yourself heedfully against them all. Men will do this with respect to their bodily infirmities and distempers. The seasons, the diet, and the air that have proved offensive are carefully avoided. Are the things of the soul of less importance? Know that he who dares to dally with occasions of sin will dare to sin. He that will venture upon temptations unto wickedness will venture upon wickedness.

Hazael thought he should not be so wicked as the prophet told him he would be. To convince him, the prophet tells him no more but, “Thou shalt be king over Syria” (2Ki 8:13). If he will venture on temptations unto cruelty, he will be cruel. Tell a man he shall commit such and such sins, he will startle at it. 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.

Particular directions belonging to this head are many, not now to be insisted on. But because this head is of no less importance than the whole doctrine here handled, I have dealt with it in depth in another treatise about entering into temptations.⁸⁵

7. Rise at the First Evidence of Sin

The seventh direction for mortification is:

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 (Job 38:11). 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. Its not acting is easier to be compassed than its bounding. Therefore James gives the gradation and process of lust (Jam 1:14-15), so that we may stop at the entrance.

Do you find your corruption begins to entangle your thoughts? Rise up with all your strength against it, with no less indignation than if it had fully accomplished what it aims at. Consider what an unclean thought would have: it would have you roll yourself in folly and filth. Ask envy what it would have: murder and destruction is at the end of it. 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, it gets also upon the understanding to slight it.

⁸⁵ See Owen’s related classic on this subject: *Of Temptation*.

Chapter 12

PREPARATORY DIRECTIONS

Meditations upon God

8. Exercise Yourself to Meditate upon God

The eighth preparatory direction for the mortification of sin is:

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.

Such meditations include the following.

a. The excellence and majesty of God

Be much in thoughtfulness about the excellence of the majesty of God and your own 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 excellence of God, he is filled with self-abhorrence and is pressed to humiliation (Job 42:5-6). And in what state does the prophet Habakkuk affirm himself to be cast upon the apprehension of the majesty of God (Hab 3:16)? “With God,” says Job, “is terrible majesty” (Job 37:22). Hence men of old thought 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,” to the “dust of the balance,” in respect of God (Isa 40:12-25). 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 give you 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. Your unacquaintedness with God

Think much of your unacquaintedness with God. Though you know enough to keep you low and humble, yet how little a portion is it that you know of Him! This contemplation cast that wise man into the apprehension of himself which he expresses, “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 all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?” (Pro 30:2-4).

Labor with this also 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? You cannot bear the rays of His glorious being.

Because I look on this consideration as of great use in our walking with God, so far as it may have a consistency with that filial boldness which is given us in Jesus Christ to draw nigh to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16), I shall further insist upon it, to give an abiding impression of it to the souls of them who desire to walk humbly with God.

c. Men of high attainment yet know little of God

To keep your heart in continual awe of the majesty of God, consider that persons of the most high and eminent attainment, of the nearest and most familiar communion with God, do yet in this life know but a very little of Him and His glory. God reveals His name to Moses—the most glorious attributes that He has manifested in the Covenant of Grace: “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...” (Exo 34:57); yet all are but the “back parts” of God (33:23). All that he knows by it is but little and low compared to the perfections of His glory. Hence it is with peculiar reference to Moses that it is said, “No man hath seen God at any time” (Joh 1:18). Of him in comparison with Christ he speaks (1:17); and of him it is here said, “No man”—no, not Moses, the most eminent among them—“hath seen God at any time.” We speak much of God, can talk of Him, His ways, His works, His counsels, all the day long; but the truth is, we know very little of Him. Our thoughts, our meditations, our expressions of Him are low, many of them unworthy of His glory, none of them reaching His perfections.

1). *Objection: Moses was under the Law*

You will say that Moses was under the Law when God veiled Himself in darkness and His mind⁸⁶ in types⁸⁷ and clouds and dark institutions. Under the glorious shining of the gospel—which has brought life and immortality to light, God being revealed from His own bosom—we now know Him much more clearly, and as He is. We see His face now and not His back parts only, as did Moses.

Answer 1. I acknowledge a vast and almost inconceivable difference between the acquaintance we now have with God, after His speaking to us by His own Son (Heb 1:2), and that which the generality of the saints had under the Law. For although their eyes were as good, sharp, and clear as ours, their faith and spiritual understanding not behind ours, and the object as glorious unto them as unto us—yet our day is more clear than theirs was, the clouds are blown away and scattered (Song 4:6), the shadows of the night are gone and fled away, the sun is risen, and the means of sight is made more eminent and clear than formerly.

2. This being so, yet that peculiar sight which Moses had of God was a gospel-sight, a sight of God as “gracious,” etc., and yet it is called but his “back parts”—that is, but low and more common in comparison to His excellencies and perfections.

3. The apostle exalts to the utmost this glory of light above that of the Law, making clear that now the “vail” causing darkness is taken away (2Co 3:15-16), so that “we all, with open [or uncovered] face [are] beholding...the glory of the Lord” (3:18). And he also tells us how: “as in a glass.” “In a glass”—how is that? Clearly, perfectly? Alas, no! He tells you how that is: “We see through a glass, darkly” (1Co 13:12). It is not a telescope, which helps us to see things afar off, concerning which the apostle speaks. (And yet what poor helps are they; how short do we

⁸⁶ **mind** – purpose.

⁸⁷ **types** – patterns pointing to greater things.

come of the truth of things notwithstanding their assistance!) It is a looking-glass⁸⁸ to which he alludes, where are only obscure forms and images of things, and not the things themselves. He compares our knowledge to a sight therein.

2). We see but little

He tells you also that all that we do see “through [or by] this glass” is in darkness and obscurity, that is, in a riddle. And speaking of himself, 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 (1Co 13:12), and compares all the knowledge he had attained of God to that he had of things when he was a child (13:11). It is only a “part,” short of “that which is perfect,” such as will be “done away” or destroyed. We know what weak, feeble, uncertain notions and apprehensions children have of things of any abstract consideration; how when they grow up with good training, those incomplete conceptions vanish and they are ashamed of them. It is the commendation of a child to love, honor, believe, and obey his father; but the father knows his child’s childishness and folly in knowledge and ideas.

Notwithstanding all our confidence of high attainments, all our notions of God are but childish in respect of His infinite perfections. We lisp and babble, and say we know not what, for the most part, in our most accurate conceptions and notions of God, as we think. 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 little of Him. Hence is that promise wherewith we are so often supported and comforted in our distress: “We shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2); we shall see Him “face to face” and “know even as also [we are] known” (that is, comprehend that for which we are comprehended, 1Co 13:12); and positively, “Now [we] see him not” (1Pe 1:8). All this is concluding that here we see but His back parts; not as He is, but in a dark, obscure representation—not in the perfection of His glory.

The queen of Sheba had heard much of Solomon, and framed many great thoughts of his magnificence in her mind; but when she came and saw his glory, she was forced to confess that not half the truth had been told her (1Ki 10:1-7). We may suppose that we have here attained great knowledge, clear and high thoughts of God; but, alas, when He shall bring us into His presence, we shall cry out: We never knew Him as He is; the thousandth part of His glory, perfection, and blessedness never entered into our hearts!

d. Our unacquaintance with our end

The apostle tells us in 1 John 3:2 that we know not what we ourselves shall be, what we shall find ourselves in the end. Much less will it enter into our hearts to conceive what God is and what we shall find Him to be. Consider either Him Who is to be known, or the way whereby we know Him, and this will further appear.

1). Consider God, Who is to be known

We know so little of God, because it is God Who is thus to be known. That is, He has described Himself to us very much by this: that we *cannot* know Him. What else does He intend where He calls Himself invisible, incomprehensible, and the like? That is, He Whom we do not, cannot, know as He is.

⁸⁸ looking-glass – mirror.

Our further progress consists more in knowing what He is not than what He is. Thus He is described to be immortal and infinite. He is not as we are: mortal, finite, and limited. Hence is that glorious description of Him: “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1Ti 6:16). 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 whatsoever. We, who cannot behold the sun in its glory, are too weak to bear the beams of infinite brightness.

On this consideration, as was said, the wise man professes himself a very beast, who has “not the understanding of a man” (Pro 30:2). He knew nothing in comparison to 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). The very being of God

We need knowledge of God’s being in order to be able to instruct one another therein by words and expressions of it. However, we are so far from a knowledge of the actual being of God, that to frame any conceptions in our mind with such species and impressions of things (as we receive the knowledge of all other things by) is to make an idol to ourselves—and so to worship a god of our own making, and not the God that made us. We may as well and as lawfully hew Him out of wood or stone as form Him a being in our minds that is suited to our apprehensions. 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 only to know that we know it not!

b). What God has declared

There be some things of God that He Himself has taught us to speak of, and to regulate our expressions of them. Yet, when we have so done, we see not the things themselves; we still do not know them. 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 disputes and notions there are about omnipresence, immensity, infiniteness, and eternity. We have, I say, words and ideas 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; a mystery whose every letter is mysterious! Who can declare the generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, or the difference of the one from the other?

But I shall not further instance in particulars. 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 the goodness of His essence. And how little a portion of Him, as Job speaks, is hereby discovered (Job 26:14)!

2). *The way whereby we should know God*

We know little of God, because it is faith alone by which we know Him here. I shall not now discourse about the remaining impressions on the hearts of all men by nature that there is a God, nor what they may rationally be taught concerning that God, from the works of His creation and providence which they see and behold. It is, confessedly, and that upon the woeful experience of all ages, so weak, low, dark, and confused that none ever on that account glorified God as they ought, but, notwithstanding all their knowledge of God, were indeed “without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).

The chief and almost only acquaintance that we have with God and His dispensations⁸⁹ of Himself is by faith. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). Our knowledge of Him and His rewarding (which is also the foundation of our obedience or coming to Him) is believing. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2Co 5:7); by faith, and so by faith as not to have any express idea, image, or form of that which we believe. Faith is all the argument we have of “things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

I might here insist upon the nature of faith; and from all its accompaniments and concerns show that we know but the back parts of what we 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 he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1Jo 4:20)—that is, Whom you know not but by faith that He is. Faith receives all upon His testimony, Whom it receives to be only on His own testimony. As to its nature, it is an assent upon testimony, not an evidence upon demonstration. And the object of it, as was said before, is above us. Hence our faith, as was formerly observed, is called a seeing darkly, as in a glass. All that we know of God, we know this way; and all that we know this way is but low, dark, and obscure.

a). *Objection: Christ reveals Himself to believers*

But you will say, “All this is true, but yet it is only so to them that know not God, perhaps, as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. With them who know Christ it is otherwise. It is true, ‘No man hath seen God at any time, [but] the only-begotten Son...he hath declared [that is, revealed] him’ (Joh 1:18); and ‘the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true’ (1Jo 5:20). ‘The light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,’ shines upon believers (2Co 4:4). Yes, and ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (4:6). So that though we ‘were sometimes darkness,’ yet we are now ‘light in the Lord’ (Eph 5:8). And the apostle says, ‘we all, with open face beholding...the glory of the Lord’ (2Co 3:18). Therefore, we are now so far from being in such darkness, or at such a distance from God, that our communion and ‘fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son’ (1Jo 1:3). The light of the gospel whereby now God is revealed is glorious: not a star, but the sun in His beauty is risen upon us, and the vail is taken from our faces. So that though unbelievers, yea, and perhaps some weak believers, may be in some darkness, yet those of any growth or considerable attainments have a clear sight and view of the face of God in Jesus Christ.”

To which I answer the following.

⁸⁹ **dispensations** – self-revelation.

1). *The truth is, all of us know enough of Him to love Him more than we do*, to delight in Him, serve Him, believe Him, obey Him, and put our trust in Him, above all that we have hitherto attained. Our darkness and weakness is no plea for our negligence and disobedience. Who is it that has walked according to the knowledge that he has of the perfections, excellencies, and will of God? 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, and 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.

2). *Comparatively, that knowledge which we have of God by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel is exceeding eminent and glorious*. It is so in comparison of any knowledge of God that might otherwise be attained, or that 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 pursues at length in 2 Corinthians 3:6ff. Christ has 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 while He kept His people under the tutelage of the Law. This is that which, for the most part, is intended in the places before mentioned. The clear delivery and declaration of God and His will in the gospel is expressly exalted in comparison to any other way of revelation of Himself.

3). *The difference between believers and unbelievers as to knowledge is not so 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 has a large apprehension of things, but that what he does apprehend, which perhaps may be very little, he sees in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light. This is that which gives us communion with God, and not prying thoughts or inquisitively elevated notions.

4). *Jesus Christ by His Word and Spirit reveals to the hearts of all His people God as a Father, as a God in covenant, as a rewarder*. He does this in every way sufficiently to teach us to obey Him here, and to lead us to His bosom, to lie down there in the fruition of Him to eternity. But yet now,

5). *Notwithstanding all this, it is but a little portion we know of Him*. We see but His back parts. This is because of the following.

1st. The intention of all gospel revelation is not to unveil God's essential glory, that we should see Him as He is, but merely to declare so much of Him as He knows sufficient to be a foundation for our faith, love, obedience, and coming to Him—that is, of the faith that He here expects from us, and of such services as are fit for poor creatures in the midst of temptations. But when He calls us to eternal admiration and contemplation without interruption, [that is, in heaven], He will make a new manner of discovery of Himself. Then the whole shape of things as it now lies before us will depart as a shadow.

2ndly. We are dull and slow of heart to receive the things that are in the Word revealed. God, by our infirmity and weakness, keeps us in continual dependence on Him for teachings and revelations of Himself out of His Word, never in this world bringing any soul to the ut-

most of what is from the Word to be made out and discovered. Therefore, although 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 intention 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 that is unsuited to the thriving or flourishing of any lust whatever? Let the soul be continually accustomed to 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 we have to do"—even "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 4:13; 12:29). In your greatest humiliations at His presence and eye, know that your very nature is too narrow to bear apprehensions suitable to His essential glory.

Chapter 13

PREPARATORY DIRECTIONS

Speak No Peace

9. Speak No Peace until God Speaks Peace

The ninth and last preparatory direction for mortification of sin is:

In case God disquiets your heart about the guilt of its distempers, either in respect of sin's root and indwelling, or in respect of any eruptions of sin, take heed that you speak not peace to yourself before God speaks it. Instead, hearken to what He says to your soul.

This is our next direction. Without its observation, 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 in this. All the warnings 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. Such groundless speaking peace results in blessing ourselves in 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.

a. Preparatory observations

To manage this direction aright, observe the following.

1). God sovereignly chooses

It is the great prerogative and sovereignty of God to give grace to whom He pleases. He has “mercy on whom he will”; and among all the sons of men, He calls whom He will and sanctifies whom He will (Rom 9:18; 8:30). In the same way, among those so called and justified, and among those 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 among them on whom He has bestowed grace. He is the “God of all comfort” in an especial manner in His dealing with believers (2Co 1:3); 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 in Isaiah 57:16-18. It is in this case we are considering that is there insisted on. When God says He will heal their breaches and disconsolations, He assumes this privilege to Himself in an especial manner. “I create... peace” (57:19)—that is, even in respect of these poor wounded creatures, I create peace. According to my sovereignty, I make it out as I please.

Hence, as it is with the bestowal of grace to them who are in the state of nature, God does it very surprisingly, and His proceedings therein in taking and leaving, as to outward appearances, are quite different, and often contrary, to all probable expectations. So is it in His commu-

nication of peace and joy in reference unto them that are in the state of grace: He often gives them out quite besides our expectation as to any apparent basis for His dealings.

2). *Christ sovereignly speaks*

As God creates peace for whom He pleases, so it is the prerogative of Christ to speak peace 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, Christ takes to Himself that title, “the Amen, the faithful and true 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 and true witness”; and what He speaks of our state and condition, that it indeed is. He is said not to “judge after the sight of his eyes” (Isa 11:3)—that is, not according to any outward appearance, or anything that may be subject to a mistake, as we are apt to do—but He shall judge and determine every cause as it indeed is.

b. Evidences for when peace is self-spoken

Given these two previous observations, I shall give some rules whereby men may know whether God speaks peace to them, or whether they speak peace to themselves only.

1). *If sin is not detested*

Men certainly speak peace to themselves when their so doing is not attended with the greatest detestation imaginable of the sin involved, and abhorrence of themselves for it. Often men are wounded, disquieted, and perplexed by sin, knowing that there is no remedy for them but only in the mercies of God through the blood of Christ. When these look to God and to the promises of the new covenant in Christ (Heb 8:8-13), they quiet their hearts that it shall be well with them, and that God will be exalted by His being gracious to them. But if their souls are not wrought to the greatest detestation of the sin or sins on whose account they are disquieted, then they have healed themselves, and have not been healed of God. This is only a great and strong wind in which the Lord is near, but not in (1Ki 19:11).

When men do truly “look upon [Christ] whom they have pierced,” without which there is no healing or peace, they will “mourn” (Zec 12:10). They will mourn for Him, even upon this account, and detest the sin that pierced Him. When we go to Christ for healing, faith eyes Him peculiarly as one pierced. Faith takes several views of Christ, according to the occasions it has for prayer and communion with Him. Sometimes faith views His holiness, sometimes His power, sometimes His love, sometimes His favor with His Father. And when faith seeks healing and peace, it looks especially on the blood of the covenant, on Christ’s sufferings; for “the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). When we look for healing, His stripes are to be eyed—not in the outward story of them, which is the course of popish devotionists, but in the love, kindness, mystery, and purpose of the cross. And when we look for peace, His chastisements must be in our eye.

Now this, I say, if it be done according to the mind of God and in the strength of that Spirit which is poured out on believers, it will beget a detestation of that sin or sins for which healing and peace is sought. So, “Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.” And what then? “Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed” (Eze 16:60-61). When God comes home to speak peace in a sure covenant of peace (Isa 54:10; Eze 34:25; 37:26), it fills the soul with shame for all the ways in which it has been alienated from Him.

One of the things that the apostle mentions as attending that godly sorrow which is accompanied with repentance unto salvation, never to be repented of, is revenge: “Yea, what revenge!” (2Co 7:11). They reflected on their transgressions with indignation and revenge for their folly in them. When Job comes up to a thorough healing from his sin, he cries, “Wherefore I abhor myself” (Job 42:6). Until he did so, he had no abiding peace. He might perhaps have made peace to himself with that doctrine of free grace which was so excellently preached by Elihu (33:14-30); but he had then only skinned his wounds—he must come to self-abhorrence if he would come to healing.

So was it with those in Psalm 78:33-35, in their great trouble and perplexity for and upon the account of sin. I doubt not but upon the address they made to God in Christ (for that so they did is evident from the titles they gave Him: they call Him their Rock and their Redeemer, two words everywhere pointing out the Lord Christ), they spoke peace to themselves. But was it sound and abiding? No, it passed away as the early dew. God speaks not one word of peace to their souls. But why had they not peace? Why, because in their address to God they flattered Him. But how does that appear? “Their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast” (v. 37); they had not a detestation nor forsaking of that sin for which they spoke peace to themselves.

Let a man make what application he will for healing and peace, 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 abhorrence of that sin which was the wound and caused the disquietment,⁹⁰ 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 underneath, which will putrefy, corrupt, and corrode until it breaks out again with injury, vexation, and danger. Let not poor souls that walk in such a path as this, who are more sensible of the trouble of sin than of the pollution of uncleanness that attends it; who address themselves for mercy even to the Lord Jesus Christ, but yet will keep the sweet morsel of their sin under their tongue—let them, I say, never think to have true and solid peace.

For instance, you find your heart running out after the world, and it disturbs you in your communion with God; the Spirit speaks expressly to you: “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1Jo 2:15). This puts you on dealing with God in Christ for the healing of your soul, the quieting of your conscience—but yet, with all this, a thorough detestation of the evil itself does not abide upon you. Perhaps there is some detestation, but only in respect of the consequences of your sin. Perhaps you may be saved, but only as through fire (1Co 3:12-15). Perhaps God will still have some work with you before He is done, but you will have little peace in this life. You will be sick and fainting all your days (Isa 57:17).

This is a deceit that lies at the root of the peace of many professors and destroys it. They deal with all their strength about mercy and pardon, and seem to have great communion with God in their so doing. They lie before Him and bewail their sins and follies, so that anyone would think—yea, they even think themselves—that surely they and their sins are now parted; and so they receive in mercy what satisfies their hearts for a little season. But when a thorough search comes to be made, there has been some secret reserve for the folly or follies treated about—at least there has not been the thorough abhorrence of it that is necessary—and

⁹⁰ **disquietment** – disturbance.

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). If rational principles are relied upon

a). The meaning of relying upon rational principles

When men measure out peace to themselves upon the conclusions that their convictions and rational principles will carry them to, this is a false peace and will not abide. I shall a little explain what I mean by this.

A man has got a wound by sin; he has a conviction of some sin upon his conscience. He has not walked uprightly as becomes the gospel; all is not well and right between God and his soul. He considers now what is to be done. He has light, and knows what path he must take, and how his soul has been formerly healed. Considering that the promises of God's Word are the outward means of application for the healing of his sores and quieting of his heart, he goes to them, searches them out, finds out some one or more of them whose literal words are directly suited to his condition. He then says to himself, "God speaks in this promise; here I will take myself a plaster⁹¹ as long and broad as my wound." And so he 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 (1Ki 19:11-12). It has not been the work of the Spirit, Who alone can "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (Joh 16:8), but the mere actings of the intelligent, rational soul.

There are three sorts of lives: the vegetative, the sensitive, and the rational or intelligent. Some things have only the vegetative; some the sensitive also, and that includes the former. Some have the rational, which takes in and supposes both the others. Now, he who has the rational not only acts suitably to that principle, but also to both the others: he grows and is sensible. So it is with men in the things of God. Some are mere natural and rational men; some have a superadded conviction with illumination; and some are truly regenerate. Now, he who has the latter has also both the former; and therefore he acts sometimes upon the principles of the rational, and sometimes upon the principles of the spiritually enlightened man. His true spiritual life is not the principle of all his motions: he acts not always in spiritual strength, neither are all his fruits from that root. In this case that I speak of, he acts merely upon the principle of conviction and illumination, whereby his first natural inclinations are heightened.

But the Spirit breathes not at all upon all these waters. For example, suppose the wound and disquiet of the soul is upon the account of relapses. Whatever the evil or folly is, even if very small, yet there are no wounds nor disquietments deeper than those that are given the soul on this account. In the inner turmoil of his mind, he finds out that promise: "The Lord...will have mercy upon him, and our God...will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7)—that is, He will multiply or add to pardon, He will do it again and again. Or he finds the promise in Hosea 14:4, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." This the man considers, and thereupon concludes peace to himself. Whether or not the Spirit of God makes the application, whether or not the Spirit gives life and power to the letter, that he does not regard. He does not hearken whether God the Lord speaks peace. He does not wait upon God, Who perhaps yet 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

⁹¹ **plaster** – bandage spread with a healing substance to cover and close wounds.

(Hos 9:9), when he shall see that it is in vain to go one step where God does not take him by the hand.

b). How to know when this is the case

I see here, indeed, various other questions about this arising and intervening themselves. I cannot apply myself to them all: I shall speak a little to one.

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

Answer 1). God will let us know. If any of you are out of the right way in this regard, God will speedily let you know it. For besides, you have His promise that “the meek he will guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psa 25:9). He will not let you always err. He will, I say, not suffer your nakedness to be covered with fig-leaves, but will take them away and all the peace you have in them, and will not suffer you to settle on such self-satisfaction. You shall quickly know your wound is not healed; that is, you shall speedily know whether or not this is your situation. The peace you thus get and obtain will not abide. While the mind is overpowered by its own convictions, there is no hold for disquietments⁹² to fix upon. Stay a little, and all these reasonings will grow cold and vanish before the face of the first temptation that arises.

Answer 2). This course is commonly taken without waiting; which is the grace and the peculiar acting of faith that God calls 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 was the case of David when he cut off the lap of Saul’s garment (1Sa 24:5). But ordinarily in such a case, God calls for waiting and laboring (Psa 130:6; 128:2), attending as the eye of a servant upon his master. Says the prophet Isaiah, “I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob” (8:17). When they have run from His house and are so ashamed that they dare not come to Him, God will have His children lie a while at His door, and not instantly rush in upon Him (Isa 28:16), unless He take them by the hand and pull them in. Now, self-healers, or men that speak peace to themselves, do commonly make haste; they will not tarry. They do not hearken what God speaks, but on they will go to be healed.

Answer 3). Such a course does not sweeten the heart with rest and gracious contentment, though it may quiet the conscience and the mind, the rational part of the soul. The answer it receives is much like that which Elisha gave Naaman: “Go in peace” (2Ki 5:19). It quieted his mind, but I much question whether it sweetened his heart or gave him any joy in believing, other than the natural joy that was then stirred in him upon his healing. “Do not my words do good?” says the Lord (Mic 2:7). When God speaks, there is not only truth in His words, which may answer the conviction of our understandings, but also they do good. They bring that which is sweet, good, and desirable to the will and affections. By them the soul returns unto its rest (Psa 116:7).

Answer 4). Which is worst of all, such a course amends not the life, it heals not the evil, it cures not the distemper. When God speaks peace, it guides and keeps the soul so that it turns not again to folly (Psa 85:8). When we speak peace to ourselves, the heart is not taken off the evil; nay, it is the readiest course in the world to bring a soul into a continual practice of back-

⁹² **disquietments** – things that rob one of peace, rest, or quietness; disturbances.

sliding. If, upon your plastering yourself, you find yourself animated to the battle again, rather than utterly weaned from it, it is too probable that you have been at work with your own soul, but Jesus Christ and His Spirit were not there. Oftentimes nature, having done its work, will come for its reward after a few days, and, having been active in the work of healing, will be ready to reason for a new wounding. However, 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 to deal perversely no more (Luk 22:32).

3). *If we do it slightly*

We speak peace to ourselves when we do it slightly.⁹³ This the prophet complains of in some teachers: "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly" (Jer 6:14). And it is so with some persons: they make the healing of their wounds a slight work. A look, a glance of faith to the promises does it, and so the matter is ended. The apostle tells us that "the word preached did not profit" some because it was "not...mixed with faith" (Heb 4:2)—that is, it was not "well-tempered" and mingled with faith. Healing is not from a mere look to the word of mercy in the promises, but it must be mingled with faith until faith is incorporated into the very nature of the healing. Then, indeed, it does good to the soul.

If you have had a wound upon your conscience that was attended with weakness and disquietness of which now you are free, how did you come to it? You might say: "I looked to the promises of pardon and healing and so found peace." Yes, 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—you have done it only slightly. You will find your wound, ere long, breaking out again; and then you shall know that you are not cured.

4). *If you ignore an equal sin*

Whoever speaks peace to himself upon any one account, and at the same time has another evil of no less importance lying upon his spirit, about which he has had no dealing with God, that man cries "Peace" when there is none. Let me explain my meaning: A man has neglected a duty again and again, perhaps, when it was due from him in all righteousness. His conscience is perplexed, his soul wounded, he has no quiet in his bones by reason of his sin. He then applies himself for healing, and finds peace. Yet, perhaps in the meantime, worldliness, 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! It shall 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 evil" (Hab 1:13).

5). *If there is no humility*

When men of themselves speak peace to their own consciences, it is seldom that God speaks humiliation to their souls. God's peace is humbling peace, melting peace, as it was in the case of David (Psa 51:17)—never such deep humiliation as when Nathan brought him the tidings of his pardon (2Sa 12:13).⁹⁴

⁹³ **slightly** – negligently; superficially.

⁹⁴ The scriptural introduction to Psalm 51 places its writing as David's response to his conviction of deep sin against Bathsheba and Uriah.

c. When to take comfort from a promise of God

But you will say, “When may we take the comfort of a promise as our own, in relation to some peculiar wound, for quieting the heart?”

1). When God speaks the promise to you

We may take the comfort of a promise for our own, first and in general, when God speaks it—be it when He will, sooner or later.⁹⁵ I told you before, He may do it in the very instant of the sin itself, and that with such irresistible power that the soul must receive His mind in it. And sometimes He will make us wait longer. But when He does speak—be it sooner or later, be it when we are sinning or repenting, be the condition of our souls what they please—if God speaks, He must be received. There is not anything in our communion with Him that the Lord is more troubled with us about, if I may so say, than our unbelieving fears, which keep us from receiving that strong consolation He is so willing to give to us.

But you will say, “We are where we were. When God speaks it, we must receive it, that is true; but how shall we know when He speaks?” I would we could all practically come up to this, to receive peace when we are convinced that God speaks it, and that it is our duty to receive it.

There is, however, if I may so say, a secret instinct in faith whereby it knows the voice of Christ when He speaks indeed. As the babe leaped in the womb when the blessed virgin came to Elisabeth (Luk 1:41), faith leaps in the heart when Christ indeed draws nigh to it. “My sheep,” says Christ, “hear my voice” (Joh 10:4, 27)—that is, they know My voice; they are used to the sound of it. They know when His lips are opened to them and are full of grace. The spouse was in a sad condition, asleep in security; but yet as soon as Christ speaks, she cries, “It is the voice of my beloved” (Song 5:2). She knew His voice, and was so acquainted with communion with Him that instantly she discovers Him. And so will you also. If you exercise yourselves to acquaintance and communion with Him, you will easily discern between His voice and the voice of a stranger. And take this criterion with you: when He speaks, He speaks as never man spoke. He speaks with power, and one way or other will make your “heart burn within” you as He did to the disciples (Luk 24:32). He does it by putting “in his hand by the hole of the door” (Song 5:4)—that is, putting His Spirit into your hearts to seize on you.

He that has his senses exercised to discern good or evil is the best judge for himself in this case, being increased in judgment and experience by a constant observation of the ways of Christ’s communication, the manner of the operations of the Spirit, and the effects it usually produces.

2). If the Word does true good to your soul

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

⁹⁵ See *The Leading of the Holy Spirit* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Chapter 14

HOW TO MORTIFY SIN

Now, the considerations which I have hitherto insisted on are more about things preparatory to the mortification of sin (chapters 9 through 13), than such as will actually accomplish it. It is the heart's due preparation for the work itself, without which it will not be accomplished, that hitherto I have aimed at.

There are very few directions that are peculiar to the actual mortifying of sin itself. They are these that follow.

1. Set Faith at Work on Christ

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. Yes, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet.

a. How faith acts upon Christ

But you will say, "How shall faith act itself on Christ for this end and purpose?" I say, in various ways.

1). Fill your soul with Christ's provisions

By faith fill your soul with a due consideration of the provision that is laid up in Jesus Christ for this end and purpose, so that all your lusts, this very lust wherewith you are entangled, may be mortified. By faith ponder on this: that though you are in no way able in or by yourself to get the conquest over your distemper, though you are even weary of contending and are utterly ready to faint, yet that there is enough in Jesus Christ to yield relief to you (Phi 4:13). It sustained the prodigal when he was ready to faint that yet there was bread enough in his father's house (Luk 15:17); though he was at a distance from it, yet it relieved and strengthened him that bread was there. In your greatest distress and anguish, consider that fullness of grace (Joh 1:16; Col 1:19), those riches, those treasures of strength (Isa 40:28), might, and help that are laid up in Him for our support. Let them come into and abide in your mind. Consider that He is "exalted...to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel" (Act 5:31)—and if to give repentance, to give mortification, without which there is no repentance, nor can there be.

Christ tells us that we obtain purging grace by abiding in Him (Joh 15:4). To act faith upon the fullness that is in Christ for our supply is an eminent way of abiding in Christ, for both our engrafting and abode is by faith (Rom 11:19-20). Let, then, your soul by faith be exercised 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 an habitation of dragons. I have made promises and broken them; vows and engagements have been as nothing to me. Many persuasions have I had that I had got the victory and should be delivered, but I am deceived. I plainly see that, without some eminent help and assistance, I am lost and shall be prevailed on to utterly forsake 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 (Heb 12:12). Behold, the Lord Christ, Who has all fullness of grace in His heart, all fullness of power in His hand, He is able to slay all these His enemies (Joh 1:16; Mat 28:18). There is sufficient provision in Him for my relief and assistance. He can take my drooping, dying soul and make me more than a conqueror (Rom 8:37).

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? there is no searching of his understanding. 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; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 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.” Yes, 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 (Isa 35:7).

In this way, God strengthened Paul under his temptation with the consideration of the sufficiency of His grace: “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 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. If hereby you do not find success to a conquest, yet you will be supported in the chariot so that you shall not retreat out of the field until the battle be ended. You will be kept from an utter despondency and a lying down under your unbelief, or a turning aside to false means and remedies, that in the end will not relieve you. The efficacy of this consideration will be found only in its practice.

2). *Expect relief from Christ*

Raise up your heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ. Relief from Christ in this case is like the prophet’s vision; it “is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab 2:3). 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 servants look unto the hands of their masters” (Psa 123:2) when they expect to receive somewhat from them—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 ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isa 7:9).

b. Jesus Christ: The ground of faith

But will you say, “What ground have I to build such an expectation upon, so that I may expect not to be deceived?”

As you have necessity to put yourself on this course, you must be relieved and saved this way or not at all. To whom will you go (Joh 6:68)? So there are in the Lord Jesus innumerable things to encourage and engage you to this expectation.

For the necessity of it, I have in part discovered it before, when I showed that this is the work of faith and of believers only. “Without me,” says Christ, “ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5), speaking with special relation to the purging of the heart from sin (15:2). Mortification of any sin must be by a supply of grace; of ourselves we *cannot* do it! Now, “it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19), that of His fullness we might receive grace for grace (Joh 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 all might” “in the inner man,” it is by Christ’s dwelling “in your hearts by faith” (Col 1:11; Eph 3:16-17).

I have also showed before that this work is not to be done without the Spirit. Whence, then, do we expect the Spirit? From Whom do we look for Him? Who has promised Him to us, having procured Him for us? Ought not all our expectations to this purpose to be on Christ alone? Let this, then, be fixed upon your heart, that if you have not relief from Him, you shall never have any relief at all! All ways, endeavors, and contendings that are not animated by this expectation of relief from Christ, and Him only, are to no purpose and will do you no good. If they are anything but supports of your heart in this expectation, or means appointed by Himself for the receiving help from Him, they are in vain.

Now, further to engage you to this expectation, consider the following.

1). Christ our High Priest

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. He says, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (Isa 66:13). He has the tenderness of a mother to a nursing child.

“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 succour⁹⁶ them that are tempted” (Heb 2:17-18).

How is the ability of Christ upon the account of His suffering proposed to us? “In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is *able*.” Did the sufferings and temptations of Christ add to His ability and power? Not, doubtless, considered absolutely and in itself. But the ability here mentioned is such as is accompanied by readiness, inclination, and willingness to put itself forth; it is an ability of will against all dissuasions.⁹⁷ He is able, having suffered and having

⁹⁶ **succour** – help.

⁹⁷ **dissuasions** – persuasions not to do or believe something.

been tempted, to break through all dissuasions to the contrary in order to relieve poor tempted souls: “He is able to help.”

It is a metonymy of the effect; for He can now be moved to help, having been so tempted. So it is in Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we have not an high priest which 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.” The exhortation of verse 16 is the same that I am upon: namely, that we would 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: grace for seasonable help. I am ready to die, to perish, to be lost forever. Iniquity will prevail against me if help come not in.” Says the apostle, “Expect this help, this relief, this grace from Christ.” Yea, but on what account? That which he lays down in verse 15. And we may observe that the word which we have translated *to obtain* is literally *to receive*. “That we may *receive* it”: suitable and seasonable help will come in. I shall freely say that this one thing of establishing the soul by faith in expectation of relief from Jesus Christ (Mat 11:28), 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 result, than all the most rigid means of self-maceration that ever any of the sons of men engaged in. Yea, let me add that never any soul did or shall 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 (Isa 55:1-3; Rev 3:18).

2). Christ’s faithfulness

Consider His faithfulness Who has promised, which may raise you up and confirm you in this waiting in an expectation of relief. He has promised to relieve in such cases, and He will fulfil 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 31:35-36). Thence David said that he watched for relief from God “more than they that watch for the *morning*” (Psa 130:6)—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 has promised (Heb 10:23). Particular promises to this purpose are innumerable. Let the soul be always furnished with some of them that seem peculiarly to suit its condition.

c. Eminent advantages

Now, there are two eminent advantages that always attend this expectation of succor from Jesus Christ.

1). Speedy assistance

This expectation of help from Christ engages Him to a full and speedy assistance. Nothing more engages the heart of a man to be useful and helpful to another than the man’s expectation of help from him, if justly raised and countenanced by him who is to give the relief. Our Lord Jesus has raised our hearts to this expectation by His kindness, care, and promises; certainly our rising up to it must of necessity be a great engagement upon Him to assist us accordingly. This the psalmist gives us as an approved maxim: “Thou, Lord, hast never forsaken them that seek thee” (Psa 9:10). When the heart is once won to rest in God, to repose itself on Him, He will assuredly satisfy it. He will never be as water that fails; nor has He said at any

time to the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye me in vain” (Isa 45:19). If Christ be chosen for the foundation of our supply, He will not fail us.

2). Attend to all Christ’s ways

This expectation of help from Christ engages the heart to attend diligently to all the ways and means whereby Christ is accustomed to communicate Himself to the soul, and so takes in the real assistance of all graces and ordinances whatever. He that expects anything from a man applies himself to the ways and means whereby it may be obtained. The beggar that expects alms lies at the door or in the way of the person from whom he expects it. The way whereby and the means wherein Christ ordinarily communicates Himself are His ordinances. He that expects anything from Him must attend upon Him therein.

It is the expectation of faith that sets the heart on work. It is not an idle, groundless hope that I speak of. If now there be any vigor, efficacy, and power in prayer or sacrament⁹⁸ 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 further insist on them when they are grounded on this foundation and spring from this root. They are of singular use to this purpose, and not else.

d. Particular directions

Now, on this direction for the mortification of a prevailing distemper, you may have a thousand testimonials as to its value. Who has walked with God under this temptation, and has not found the use and success of it? I dare leave the soul under it, without adding any more. Only some particulars relating thereunto may be mentioned.

1). Act faith upon Christ crucified

First, act faith peculiarly upon the death, blood, and cross of Christ—that is, on Christ as crucified and slain. Mortification of sin is peculiarly from the death of Christ. It is one peculiar, eminent end of the death of Christ that shall assuredly be accomplished by it. He died to destroy the works of the devil. Whatever came upon our natures by the devil’s first temptation,⁹⁹ whatever receives strength in our persons by his daily suggestions, Christ died to destroy it all.

“He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and *purify* unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14). This was Christ’s aim and intention (in which He will not fail) for His giving Himself for us. It was His design that we might be freed from the power of our sins and purified from all our defiling lusts. “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might *sanctify and cleanse* it with the washing of water by the word, 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 shall be accomplished by virtue of His death, in various and several degrees.

⁹⁸ **sacrament** – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by Christ, to represent him and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him, and solemnly to engage us to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.”—*Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*, chapter 28. Baptists often refer to these as “ordinances.”

⁹⁹ **devil’s first temptation** – temptation in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), resulting in Adam’s (and thereby all mankind’s) fall into sin and depravity.

Hence our washing, purging, and cleansing from sin is everywhere ascribed to His blood (1Jo 1:7; Heb 1:3; Rev 1:5). “How much more shall the blood of Christ,” being sprinkled on us, “*purge* your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). This is that which we aim at, this we are in pursuit of: that our consciences may be purged from dead works, that they may be rooted out, destroyed, and have place in us no more. This shall certainly be brought about by the death of Christ: virtue will go out from thence to this purpose. Indeed, all supplies of the Spirit, all communications of grace and power, are from His death—as I have elsewhere showed.¹⁰⁰

Thus the apostle states it in Romans 6:2, where the case is proposed that we are considering: “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” That is, how shall we live in sin when we are dead to sin by profession; dead to sin by obligation to be so; dead to sin by participation of virtue and power for the killing of it; dead to sin by union and interest in Christ, in and by Whom it is killed?

This he presses by various considerations all taken from the death of Christ in the ensuing verses. This must not be: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (6:3). We have in baptism¹⁰¹ an evidence of our implantation into Christ; we are baptized *into* Him. But what of Christ are we baptized into an interest in? “His death,” he says. If indeed we are baptized into Christ (beyond mere outward profession), we are baptized into His death.

The explanation of this, of one being baptized into the death of Christ, the apostle gives us in verses 4 and 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 being baptized into the death of Christ,” he says, “is this, namely, our conformity thereunto: to be dead unto sin, to have our corruptions mortified, as He was put to death for sin, so that as He was raised up to glory, we may be raised up to grace and newness of life.”

He tells us whence it is that we have this baptism into the death of Christ in verse 6, and this is from the death of Christ itself: “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed”—“is crucified with him,” not in respect of time, but as the cause. We are crucified with Him *meritoriously*,¹⁰² in that He procured the Spirit for us to mortify sin; *efficiently*, in that from His death virtue comes forth for our crucifying; *as a representation and example*, in that we shall assuredly be crucified unto sin as He was for our sin. This is what the apostle intends: Christ by His death—destroying the works of the devil and procuring the Spirit for us—has so killed sin as to its reign in believers that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.

¹⁰⁰Owen, *Works*, Vol. 2, “Communion with Christ,” chapters 7-8.

¹⁰¹**baptism** – water rite, which is an outward sign and symbol of our spiritual identification and union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection; the result of this spiritual union of the soul with Christ is that the old man, characterized by sin and selfishness, has died, and the new man has risen to love, grace, and all the fruits of the Spirit in new life in Christ.

¹⁰²Our crucifixion with Christ is accomplished based on Christ’s merit, not our own.

2). Act faith in conformity to Christ crucified

Secondly, act faith on the death of Christ under these two notions: first, in expectation of power; secondly, in endeavors for conformity.¹⁰³ For the first, the direction given in general may suffice. As to the latter, that of the apostle may give us some light into our direction. Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as He is set forth dying and crucified for us (Gal 3:1). Look on Him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying.¹⁰⁴ Bring Him in that condition into your heart by faith. Apply His blood so shed to your corruptions; and do this daily.

I might draw out this consideration to a great length, in various particulars, but I must come to a close.

2. Understand the Work of the Spirit

I have only, then, to add the work of the Spirit in this business of mortification, which is so peculiarly ascribed to Him.

In one word: This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is effected, carried on, and accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all the parts and degrees of it.

a. He alone clearly and fully convinces the heart of the evil, guilt, and danger of the corruption, lust, or sin to be mortified. Without this conviction, or while this conviction is so faint that the heart can wrestle with it or digest it, there will be no thorough work made. An unbelieving heart (as in part we all have) will try to find a way to avoid any consideration of sin unless it is overpowered by clear and evident convictions. Now this is the proper work of the Spirit: "He will reprove [that is, convince] of sin" (Joh 16:8). He alone can do it.

If men's rational considerations of the preaching of the letter were able to convince them of sin, it might be that we would 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, and that they themselves are guilty of them. But this light is not powerful, nor does it lay hold on the practical principles of the soul, so as to conform the mind and will unto them to produce effects suitable to such an apprehension. And therefore it is that wise and knowing men, destitute of the Spirit, do not think those things to be sins at all in which the chief movings and actings of lust do consist. It is the Spirit alone that can do, that does, this work to the purpose.

And this is the first thing that the Spirit does in order to the mortification of any lust whatever: 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 pretenses, and makes the soul own its abomination and lie down under the sense of it. Unless this is 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 (1Co 2:9-12).

c. The Spirit alone establishes the heart in expectation of relief from Christ; which is the great sovereign means of mortification, as has been shown (2Co 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.

¹⁰³Phi 3:10; Col 3:3; 1Pe 1:18-19.

¹⁰⁴1Co 15:3; 1Pe 1:18-19; 4:1-2; Col 1:14, 18.

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 or decreased (Eph 3:16-18).

f. **The soul has support from the Spirit** in all its addresses to God in this condition. Whence is the power, life, and vigor of prayer? Whence its effectiveness to prevail with God? Is it not from the Spirit? He is the “spirit of grace and of supplications” promised to them “who look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zec 12:10), enabling them to pray “with groanings which 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 besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me” (2Co 12:8).

What the work of the Spirit in prayer is, whence and how He gives us assistance and makes us to prevail, and what we are to do that we may enjoy His help for that purpose, is not my present intention to demonstrate.



Thus the author ends this great and important work on the mortification of sin in believers. Let all God's people take to heart their serious continual duty to be mortifying every sin daily, in order to glorify God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Always be killing sin, or it will be killing you!”

Questions for Study and Discussion

Chapter

1. What is the connection between mortification and salvation?
2. a. What about indwelling sin requires mortification to be continuous?
b. What happens when believers do not mortify sin?
3. Why must mortification be the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. How do believers' life and comfort depend upon mortification?
5. What are some common misconceptions about mortification?
6. Describe what mortification actually is.
7. If mortification is the work of the Holy Spirit, how is the believer's faith involved?
8. Why is universal diligence needed for mortification?
9. a. What are some of the most dangerous symptoms when mortification is absent?
b. What are these symptoms of?
10. How do you get a clear sense of your sin?
11. a. What two aspects of guilt are important in mortification? Why?
b. How does personal temperament come into mortification?
c. Why is it important to rise at the *first* evidence of sin?
12. Why is it important to meditate upon God?
13. a. What is it to speak peace to oneself?
b. How is avoiding this important to mortification?
14. How does faith act upon Christ in mortification?