
THE MORTIFICATION
OF SIN

THE TREASURES OF JOHN OWEN

THE MORTIFICATION
OF SIN

*Abridged and made easy to read by
Richard Rushing*



THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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Preface

CHRISTIAN READER,

I will briefly acquaint you with the main reasons for my consenting to publish the following discourse.

1. *The present state of professing believers.*

My primary reason is the obvious difficulty that most professing Christians have in dealing with the temptations that surround them. These arise in large measure from the fact that at this time they are both at peace in the world and divided among themselves. So important is this issue to me that I will be pleased if all I can do by the present work is to encourage others to press on men's consciences the need to consider their ways, and to give believers clearer directions on how to proceed in the mortification of sin.

2. *Dangerous mistakes concerning mortification.*

My second main reason is the dangerous mistakes some have fallen into recently in dealing with this subject.

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Through lack of acquaintance with the mystery of the gospel and the efficacy of the death of Christ, they have imposed a system of self-wrought mortification on the necks of their disciples which neither they nor their forefathers were ever able to bear. The mortification they press is not suitable to the gospel in nature or effect, and regularly has the deplorable outcome of producing superstition, self-righteousness and anxiety of conscience in those who take their teaching up.

What I here present, though in weakness, I humbly hope will answer to the spirit and letter of the gospel, as well as to the experience of those who know what it is to walk with God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. Certainly, something of this kind is needed now to promote the work of gospel mortification in the hearts of believers and direct them into safe paths where they will find rest for their souls.

Having preached on this subject, with some success, through the grace of Him who ministers seed to the sower, I was encouraged by friends in whose hearts are the ways of God to publish what I had delivered. I could not help recalling the debt I already stood under through promising to provide a treatise on *Communion with God*.¹ I thought that, if I could not yet settle the larger

¹ See Owen's *Works*, vol. 2 (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 'On Communion with God', pp. 1-274; and *Communion with God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991) in the present series of abridgements which seek to make 'the treasures of John Owen' more accessible to present-day readers.

debt, I might at least offer them this discourse on *fighting against themselves* as an interest payment, in return for their forbearance, while they wait for the discourse on *peace and communion with God*.

Besides, I thought that, having been providentially engaged in public debate on various controversies in religion, I might provide something of more general use, as a matter of choice, rather than of necessity.

For these and similar reasons I have brought this short discourse to public view, and now present it to you. I hope I may truly claim that my heart's desire to God and my main aim in the station in which the good providence of God has placed me is that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my heart and in the hearts and lives of others, to the glory of God; and that in this way the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things. If this little discourse may be in any way useful to this end to the least of the saints, I will look on this as an answer to the weak prayers with which it is attended, by its unworthy author,

JOHN OWEN
Oxford
1656

I

Introduction

*If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body,
you will live (Rom. 8:13)*

This is the main text and foundation upon which this discourse is based. In this text we find:

1. *To whom it is directed:* 'You believers.'
2. *The condition:* 'If you.'
3. *The means of accomplishment:* 'The Spirit.'
4. *A duty:* 'Put to death the deeds of the body.'
5. *A promise:* 'You will live.'

1. *The exhortation is directed toward believers.*

Paul is speaking to believers in that he says in verse 1 of the same chapter, 'There is therefore now no condemnation' to them. In verse 9 he explains, 'You are not in

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the flesh but in the Spirit,' and in verses 10 and 11 he speaks to those who are quickened by the Spirit of Christ.

The persons to whom this duty is directed, and the duty itself, are the foundation of this book. It is expressed in this thesis:

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

2. *The condition expresses the certainty of the relationship.*

The purpose of the condition, 'If you', is to express the certainty of the relationship between the cure and the result. There is a clear connection between the mortifying of the deeds of the body and living. This connection is not cause and effect properly and strictly, for 'eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ' (*Rom. 6:23*), but rather means and end. The intent of the text in this conditional expression is that there is a certain infallible connection and coherence between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that end; if you do mortify, you shall live. This then, is our main motive for the enforcement of this duty in our lives.

3. *Our strength in the performance of this duty comes through the Spirit.*

All other ways of mortification are in vain. Men may attempt this work based upon other principles, but they