

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 201

MORTIFICATION

*But if ye through the Spirit do
mortify the deeds of the
body, ye shall
live.*

Romans 8:13b

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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MORTIFICATION

201

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Published by Chapel Library • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

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THE DOCTRINE OF MORTIFICATION

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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

THE doctrine, which is according to godliness (1Ti 6:3), at once defines the nature of divine doctrine, intimating as it does that its design or end is to inculcate a right temper of mind and deportment of life godwards. It is pure and purifying. The objects that are revealed to faith are not bare abstractions,¹ which are to be accepted as true, nor even sublime and lofty concepts to be admired: they are to have a powerful effect upon our daily walk. There is no doctrine revealed in Scripture for a merely speculative knowledge, but all is to exert a powerful influence upon conduct. God's design in all that He has revealed to us is to the purifying of our affections and the transforming of our characters. The doctrine of grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Ti 2:11-12). By far the greater part of the doctrine (Joh 7:16) taught by Christ consisted not of the explication of mysteries, but rather that which corrected men's lusts and reformed their lives. Everything in Scripture has in view the promotion of holiness.

If it be an absurdity to affirm that it matters not what a man believes so long as he does that which is right, equally erroneous is it to conclude that if my creed be sound it matters little how I act. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1Ti 5:8), for he shows himself to be devoid of natural affection. Thus, it is possible to deny the faith by conduct as well as by words. A neglect of performing our duty is as real a repudiation of the truth as is an open renunciation of it; for the gospel, equally with the Law, requires children to honor their parents. Observe how that awful list of reprehensible characters mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 are said to be "contrary to sound doctrine"—opposed to its salutary² nature and spiritual tendency, i.e., that conduct which the standard of God enjoins. Observe

¹ **abstractions** – things which exist only as ideas.

² **salutary** – beneficial; conducive to health, spiritual health in this case.

too how that the spirit of covetousness or love of money is designated an erring “from the faith” (1Ti 6:10): it is a species of heresy, a departure from the doctrine that is according to godliness—an awful example of which we have in the case of Judas. Mortification, then, is clearly one of the practical doctrines of Holy Writ, as we hope to show abundantly in what follows...

On this occasion, we will state very briefly what is signified by “mortify”³...First, from its being here placed in apposition⁴ with “live after the flesh,” its negative sense is more or less obvious. To “live after the flesh” is to be completely controlled by indwelling sin, to be thoroughly under the dominion of our inbred corruptions. Hence, mortification consists in a course of conduct that is just the reverse. It imports:⁵ Comply not with the demands of your old nature, but rather subdue them. Serve not, cherish not your lusts, but starve them: “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). The natural desires and appetites of the physical body require to be disciplined, so that they are our servants and not our masters. It is our responsibility to moderate, regulate, and subordinate them unto the higher parts of our being. But the cravings of the body of sin are to be promptly refused and sternly denied. The spiritual life is retarded just in proportion as we yield subservience to our evil passions.

The imperative necessity for this work of mortification arises from the continued presence of the evil nature in the Christian. Upon his believing in Christ unto salvation, he was at once delivered from the condemnation of the divine Law and freed from the reigning power of sin. But “the flesh” was not eradicated from his being, nor were its vile propensities⁶ purged or even modified. That fount of filthiness remains unchanged unto the end of his earthly career. Not only so, but it is ever active in its hostility to God and holiness: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal 5:17). Thus, there is a ceaseless conflict in the saint between *indwelling* sin and *inherent* grace. Consequently, there is a perpetual need for him to mortify or put to death not only the actings of indwelling corruption but also the principle itself. He is called upon to engage in ceaseless

³ “I shall give you this plain description of [mortification]: It is a holy disposition in a regenerate man derived from the efficacy and virtue of Christ’s death, whereby the strength of sin is weakened and the dominion of it destroyed, being utterly disabled from having a commanding power or rule over the man anymore.”—*Christopher Love*

⁴ **apposition** – side-by-side; next to each other.

⁵ **imports** – conveys the meaning; signifies.

⁶ **vile propensities** – morally depraved tendencies; wicked inclinations.

warfare and not suffer temptation to bring him into captivity to his lusts. The divine prohibition is “have no fellowship [*enter into no truce, form no alliance*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11)...

No real communion with God is possible while sinful lusts remain unmortified. Allowed evil draws the heart away from God, tangles the affections, discomposes the soul, and provokes the Holy One to close His ears against our prayers: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Eze 14:3). God cannot in any wise delight in an unmortified soul: for Him to do so would be denying Himself or acting contrary to His own nature. He has no pleasure in wickedness and cannot look with the slightest approval on evil. Sin is a mire, and the more miry we are the less fit for His eyes (Psa 40:2). Sin is leprosy (Isa 1:6), and the more it spreads the less converse⁷ will the Lord have with us. Deliberately to keep sin alive is to defend it against the will of God and to challenge combat with the Most High. Unmortified sin is against the whole design of the gospel—as though Christ’s sacrifice was intended to indulge us in sin, rather than redeem us from it. The very end of Christ’s dying was the death of sin: rather than sin should not die, He laid down His life.

Though risen with Christ—their life hid with Him in God—and certain to appear with Christ in glory, the saints are nevertheless exhorted to mortify their members which are upon the earth (Col 3:1-5). It may appear strange when we note what particular members the Apostle specified.

It was not vain thoughts, coldness of heart, unwary walking, but the visible and most repulsive members of the old man: “fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence”; and in verse 8 he bids them again, “Put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication” and lying. Startling and solemn it is to find that believers require calling upon to mortify such gross and foul sins as those: yet it is no more than is necessary. The best Christians on earth have so much corruption within them, which habitually disposes them unto these iniquities (great and heinous as they are), and the devil will so suit his temptations as will certainly draw their corruptions into open acts, unless they keep a tight hand and close watch over themselves in the constant exercise of mortification. None but

⁷ **converse** – spiritual communion.

the Holy One of God could truthfully aver,⁸ “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30), which could be enkindled by his fiery darts...

It is because of their self-confidence and carelessness that sometimes the most gracious and experienced suddenly find themselves surprised by the most awful lapses. When the preacher bids his hearers beware that they murder not, blaspheme not, turn not apostates from their profession of the faith, none but the self-righteous will say with Hazael, “But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2Ki 8:13). There is no crime, however enormous, no abomination, however vile, but what any of us are capable of committing, if we do not bring the cross of Christ into our hearts by a daily mortification.

But why “mortify the deeds of the body”? In view of the studied balancing of the several clauses in this antithetical sentence,⁹ we had expected it to read, “Mortify the flesh.” In the seventh chapter and the opening verses of the eighth, the apostle had treated of indwelling sin as the fount of all evil actions; and here he insists on the mortifying of both the root and the branches of corruption, referring to the duty under the name of the fruits it bears. The “deeds of the body” must not be restricted to mere outward works, but be understood as including also the springs from which they issue. As Owen rightly said, “The axe must be laid to the root of the tree”...The “deeds of the body” are the works which corrupt nature produces, namely our sins...The body is here referred to for the purpose of informing us that though the soul be the original abode of “the flesh,” the *physical frame* is the main instrument of its actions. Our corruptions are principally manifested in our external members: it is there that indwelling sin is chiefly found and felt. Sins are denominated “the deeds of the body” not only because they are what the lusts of the flesh tend to produce, but also because they are executed by the body (Rom 6:12). Our task then is not to transform and transmute¹⁰ “the flesh,” but to slay it: to refuse its impulses, to deny its aspirations, to put to death its appetites.

But who is sufficient for such a task—a task which is not a work of nature but wholly a spiritual one? It is far beyond the unaided powers of the believer. Means and ordinances cannot of themselves effect it.

⁸ **aver** – assert as a fact.

⁹ **antithetical sentence** – a sentence consisting of a proposition that is the opposite of another already proposed [live after flesh...*die*; through Spirit mortify...*live*].

¹⁰ **transmute** – change into another form or nature.

It is beyond the province¹¹ and ability of the preacher: omnipotence must have the main share in the work. “If ye through the *Spirit* do mortify,” that is “the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ” of Romans 8:9—the Holy Spirit; for He is not only the Spirit of holiness in His nature, but in His operations too. He is the principal efficient cause of mortification. Let us marvel at and adore the divine grace that has provided such an Helper for us! Let us recognize and realize that we are as truly indebted to and dependent upon the Spirit’s operations as we are upon the Father’s electing and the Son’s redeeming us. Though grace be wrought in the hearts of the regenerate, yet it lies not in their power to act it. He Who imparted the grace must renew, excite, and direct it.

Believers may employ the aids of inward discipline and rigor, and practice outward moderation and abstinence; and while they may for a time check¹² and suppress their evil habits, unless the Spirit puts forth His power in them there will be no true mortification. And how does He operate in this particular work? In many different ways:

First, at the new birth, He gives us a new nature. Then by nourishing and preserving that nature, in strengthening us with His might in the inner man, in granting fresh supplies of grace from day to day. By working in us a loathing of sin, a mourning over it, a turning from it. By pressing upon us the claims of Christ, making us willing to take up our cross and follow Him. By bringing some precept or warning to our mind. By sealing a promise upon the heart. By moving us to pray.

Yet let it be carefully noted that our text does not say, “If the Spirit do mortify,” or even “If the Spirit through you do mortify,” but, instead, “If *ye* through the Spirit.” The believer is not passive in this work, but active. It must not be supposed that the Spirit will help us without our concurrence,¹³ as well while we are asleep as waking, whether or not we maintain a close watch over our thoughts and works, and exercise nothing but a slight wish or sluggish prayer for the mortification of our sins. Believers are required to set themselves seriously to the task. If on the one hand we cannot discharge this duty without the Spirit’s enablement, on the other hand He will not assist if we be too indolent¹⁴ to put forth earnest endeavors. Then let not the lazy Christian imagine he will ever get the victory over his lusts.

¹¹ **province** – the range of proper duties or function.

¹² **check** – stop sharply and suddenly.

¹³ **concurrence** – cooperation.

¹⁴ **indolent** – habitually lazy.

The Spirit's grace and power afford no license to idleness, but rather call upon us to the diligent use of means and looking to Him for His blessing upon the same. We are expressly exhorted, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1), and that makes it plain that the believer is not a cipher¹⁵ in this work. The gracious operations of the Spirit were never designed to be a substitute for the Christian's discharge of duty. Though His help be indispensable, yet it releases us not from our obligations. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1Jo 5:21) emphasizes our accountability and evinces that God requires much more than our waiting upon Him to stir us unto action...

Mortification is a task to which every Christian must apply himself with prayerful diligence and resolute earnestness. The regenerate have a spiritual nature within that fits them for holy action, otherwise there would be no difference between them and the unregenerate. They are required to improve¹⁶ the death of Christ, to embitter sin to them by His sufferings. They are to use the grace received in bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Nevertheless, it is a task that far transcends our feeble powers. It is only "through the Spirit" that any of us can acceptably or effectually (in any degree) "mortify the deeds of the body." He it is Who presses upon us the claims of Christ: reminding us that inasmuch as He died *for* sin, we must spare no efforts in dying *to* sin—striving against it (Heb 11:4), confessing it (1Jo 1:9), forsaking it (Pro 28:13). He it is Who preserves us from giving way to despair and encourages us to renew the conflict. He it is Who deepens our longings after holiness and moves us to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psa 51:10).

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body." Mark, my reader, the lovely balance of truth that is here so carefully preserved: While the Christian's responsibility is strictly enforced, the honor of the Spirit is as definitely maintained, and divine grace is magnified. Believers are the agents in this work, yet they perform it by the strength of Another. The duty is theirs, but the success and the glory are His. The Spirit's operations are carried on in accordance with the constitution that God has given us, working within and upon us as moral agents. The same work is, in one point of view, God's; and in another, ours. He illumines the understanding and makes us more

¹⁵ **cipher** – one who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth.

¹⁶ **improve** – make good use of for spiritual profit.

sensible of indwelling sin. He makes the conscience more sensitive. He deepens our yearnings after purity. He works in us both to will and to do of God's good pleasure (Phi 2:13). Our business is to heed His convictions, to respond to His holy impulses, to implore His aid, to count upon His grace.

"If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Here is the encouraging promise set before the sorely tried contestant. God will be no man's debtor: yea, He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). If then, by grace, we concur with the Spirit, denying the flesh, striving after holiness, richly shall we be recompensed. The promise unto this duty is opposed unto the death threatened in the clause foregoing: as "die" there includes all the penal consequences of sin, so "shall live" comprehends all the spiritual blessings of grace. If, by the Spirit's enablement and our diligent use of the divinely appointed means, we sincerely and constantly oppose and refuse the solicitations of indwelling sin, then—but only then—we shall live a life of grace and comfort here and a life of eternal glory and bliss hereafter. We have shown elsewhere that "eternal life" (1Jo 2:25) is the believer's present possession (Joh 3:36; 10:28) and his future goal (Mar 10:30; Gal 6:8; Ti 1:2). He now has a title and right to it; he has it by faith and in hope; he has the seed of it in his new nature. But he has it not yet in full possession and fruition...A life of glory proceeds not from mortification as the effect from the cause, but follows merely upon it as the end does the use of means. The highway of holiness is the only path that leads to heaven.

From a series in *Studies in the Scriptures*.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and numerous books including his well-known *The Sovereignty of God*; born in Nottingham, England.



Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

When sin lets *us* alone, we may let *sin* alone. But as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion.

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.

—John Owen

THE NATURE OF MORTIFICATION

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.—Galatians 5:24

FIRST, THE SUBJECT OF THE PROPOSITION: “They that are Christ’s,” viz.,¹ true Christians, real members of Christ; such as truly belong to Christ, such as have given themselves up to be governed by Him, and are indeed acted² by His Spirit; such, all such persons...all such, and none but such.

SECONDLY, THE PREDICATE: “They have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.” By *flesh*, we are here to understand carnal concupiscence,³ the workings and motions of corrupt nature. By the *affections*, we are to understand not the natural, but the inordinate affections.⁴ For Christ doth not abolish and destroy, but correct and regulate the affections of those that are in Him. And by *crucifying* the flesh, we are not to understand the total extinction or perfect subduing of corrupt nature, but only the deposing of corruption from its regency and dominion in the soul. Its dominion is taken away, though its life be prolonged for a season.⁵ Yet, as death surely, though slowly, follows crucifixion—the life of crucified persons gradually departing from them with their blood—it is just so in the mortification of sin. Therefore, what the apostle in this place calls *crucifying*, he calls in Romans 8:13 *mortifying*: “If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify,” if ye put to death the deeds of the body. But he chooses, in this place, to call it crucifying to show not only the conformity there is between the death of Christ and the death of sin in respect of shame, pain, and lingering slowness; but to denote also the principal means and instruments of mortification, viz., the death or cross of Jesus

¹ **viz.** – from the Latin *videlicet*, that is to say; namely.

² **acted** – animated; enlivened.

³ **carnal concupiscence** – actual sins of the flesh, sexual and otherwise.

⁴ **inordinate affections** – uncontrolled immoral passions; lustful desires; evil cravings.

⁵ “I say [mortification] is a disposition in a regenerate man because an unregenerate man is an unmortified man. It is derived from the virtue and efficacy of Christ’s death because the death of Christ not only takes away the guilt of sin, in reference to its damning power, but it likewise takes away the dominion and power of sin so that sin shall not *reign* in us. And I express it further as the disposition whereby the strength of sin is weakened and the dominion and power of it destroyed...Though the existence of sin remains, yet the commanding power of sin is taken away.”—*Christopher Love*

Christ, in the virtue whereof believers do mortify the corruptions of their flesh, the great arguments and persuasives to mortification being drawn from the sufferings of Christ for sin...

DOCTRINE: A SAVING INTEREST IN CHRIST MAY BE REGULARLY AND STRONGLY INFERRED AND CONCLUDED FROM THE MORTIFICATION OF THE FLESH WITH ITS AFFECTIONS AND LUSTS. This point is fully confirmed by those words of the apostle: “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 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. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:5-8)...The mortification of sin is an undoubted evidence of the union of such a soul with Christ, which is the very groundwork and principle of that blessed and glorious resurrection. Therefore, he saith, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:11), [as if he were saying], “Reason thus with yourselves: These mortifying influences of the death of Christ are unquestionable presages⁶ of your future blessedness, God never taking this course with any but those who are in Christ and are designed to be glorified with Him.” The death of your sin is as evidential as anything in the world can be of your spiritual life for the present and of your eternal life with God hereafter. Mortification is the fruit and evidence of your union and that union is the firm groundwork and certain pledge of your glorification. So you ought to reckon or reason the case with yourselves...

WHAT THE MORTIFICATION OR CRUCIFIXION OF SIN IMPORTS: For clearness sake, I shall speak to it both *negatively* and *positively*, showing you what is *not* intended and what *is* principally aimed at by the Spirit of God in this expression.

1. **The crucifying of the flesh doth not imply the total abolition of sin in believers or the destruction of its very being and existence in them for the present.** Sanctified souls so put off their corruptions with their dead bodies at death. This will be the effect of our *future* glorification, not of our *present* sanctification. Sin doth exist in the most mortified believer in the world (Rom 7:17). It still acteth and lusteth in the regenerate soul (Gal 5:17). Yea, notwithstanding its crucifixion in believers, it still may, in respect of single acts, surprise and captivate them (Psa 65:3; Rom 7:23)...

⁶ **presages** – signs of something about to happen.

2. **Nor doth the crucifixion of sin consist in the suppression of the external acts of sin only.** For sin may reign over the souls of men, whilst it doth not break forth into their lives in gross and open actions (1Pe 3:20; Mat 12:43)...Many a man shows a white and fair hand, who yet hath a very foul and black heart.

3. **The crucifixion of the flesh doth not consist [simply] in the cessation of the external acts of sin.** For in that respect the lusts of men may die of their own accord, even a kind of natural death. The members of the body are the weapons of unrighteousness, as the apostle calls them. Age or sickness may so blunt or break those weapons that the soul cannot use them to such sinful purposes and services as it was wont⁷ to do in the vigorous and healthful seasons of life; not that there is less sin in the heart, but because there are less strength and activity in the body. Just as it is with an old soldier, who hath as much skill, policy, and delight as ever in military actions; but age and hard services have so enfeebled him that he can no longer follow the camp.

4. **The crucifixion of sin doth not consist in the severe castigation of the body and penancing⁸ it by stripes, fasting, and tiresome pilgrimages.** This may pass for mortification among papists, but never was any lust of the flesh destroyed by this rigor. Christians, indeed, are bound not to indulge and pamper the body, which is the instrument of sin; nor must we think that the spiritual corruptions of the soul feel these stripes that are inflicted upon the body (Col 2:23). It is not the vanity of superstition, but the power of true religion that crucifies and destroys corruption. It is faith in Christ's blood, not the spilling of our own blood, which gives sin the mortal wound.

But if you enquire, what then is implied in the mortification or crucifixion of sin and wherein it doth consist? I answer,

1. **It necessarily implies the soul's implantation into Christ and union with Him without which it is impossible that any one corruption should be mortified.** They that are [Christ's] have crucified the flesh. The attempts and endeavors of all others are vain and ineffectual: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom 7:5). Sin was then in its full dominion: No abstinence, rigor, or outward severity; no purpose, promises, or solemn vows could mortify or destroy it. There must be an implantation into Christ before there

⁷ **wont** – accustomed.

⁸ **penancing** – self-punishing the body voluntarily.

can be any effectual crucifixion of sin. What believer almost hath not, in the days of his first convictions, tried all external methods and means of mortifying sin and found all in experience to be to as little purpose as the binding of Samson with green withs⁹ or cords? But when he hath once come to act faith upon the death of Christ, then the design of mortification hath prospered and succeeded to good purpose.

2. Mortification of sin implies the agency of the Spirit of God in that work, without Whose assistances and aids all our endeavors must needs be fruitless. Of this work, we may say as it was said in another case, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6). When the apostle therefore would show by what hand this work of mortification is performed, he thus expresseth it, “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). The duty is ours, but the power whereby we perform it is God’s...

3. The crucifixion of sin necessarily implies the subversion of its dominion in the soul. A mortified sin cannot be a reigning sin (Rom 6:12-14). Two things constitute the dominion of sin, viz., the fullness of its power and the soul’s subjection to it. As to the fullness of its power, that rises from the suitableness it hath and pleasure it gives to the corrupt heart of man. It seems to be as necessary as the right hand, as useful and pleasant as the right eye (Mat 5:29). But the mortified heart is dead to all pleasures and profits of sin. It hath no delight or pleasure in it; it becomes its burden and daily complaint. Mortification presupposes the illumination of the mind and conviction of the conscience; by reason whereof sin cannot deceive and blind the mind or bewitch and ensnare the will and affections as it was wont to do. Consequently, its dominion over the soul is destroyed and lost.

4. The crucifying of the flesh implies a gradual weakening of the power of sin in the soul. The death of the cross was a slow and lingering death, and the crucified person grew weaker and weaker every hour. So it is in the mortification of sin: The soul is still cleansing itself from “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1). And as the body of sin is weakened more and more, so the inward man or the new creature is “renewed day by

⁹ **withs** – tough, supple twigs, especially of willow, used for binding things together; *Hebrew* of Jdg 16:7 can also mean a green—not dried—bowstring.

day” (2Co 4:16). For sanctification is a progressive work of the Spirit: As holiness increases and roots itself deeper and deeper in the soul, so the power and interest of sin proportionally abates and sinks lower and lower, until at length it be swallowed up in victory.

5. The crucifying of the flesh notes to us the believer’s designed application of all spiritual means and sanctified instruments for the destruction of it. There is nothing in this world that a gracious heart more vehemently desires and longs for than the death of sin and perfect deliverance from it (Rom 7:24). The sincerity of [such] desires doth accordingly manifest itself in the daily application of all God’s remedies. Such are daily watching against the occasions of sin: “I have made a covenant with mine eyes” (Job 31:1). More than ordinary vigilance over their special or proper sin: “I kept myself from mine iniquity” (Psa 18:23). Earnest cries to heaven for preventing grace:¹⁰ “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me” (Psa 19:13). Deep humbling of soul for sins past, which is an excellent preventive unto future sins: “[in] that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you” (2Co 7:11). Care to give no furtherance or advantage to the design of sin by making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, as others do (Rom 13:13-14). Willingness to bear due reproofs for sin, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness” (Psa 141:5). These, and such like means of mortification, regenerate souls are daily using and applying in order to the death of sin.

From “The Method of Grace” in *The Works of John Flavel*, Vol. II,
reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust.

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian and minister at Dartmouth, Devonshire, England. Voluminous writer of evangelical works such as *The Fountain of Life Opened* and *Keeping the Heart*. His vivid word pictures resulted in memorable, life-changing sermons. One of his hearers said “that person must have a very soft head, or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected”; born at Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, England.



The saints, whose souls breathe after deliverance from [sin’s] perplexing rebellion, know there is no safety against it but in a constant warfare.

—*John Owen*

¹⁰ **preventing grace** – of divine grace: That which goes before and leads or guides; especially, grace that inclines to repentance and salvation; also called *prevenient* grace.

IDENTIFYING BELOVED LUSTS

Benjamin Needler (1620-1682)

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

—Matthew 5:29-30

IN the verse before, our Savior tells us that “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” This was spoken in opposition to the scribes and Pharisees and may be urged against many carnal Protestants that have but gross conceits concerning the Law of God, and in particular, that the *outward* act of uncleanness only is the breach of the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Now, our Savior corrects this mistake: that “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”—not *will* do it, but he *hath* done it already. There is a speedy passage from the eye to the heart. And because the eye and the hand are many times used as principal incitements to this sin, our Savior gives His disciples and us this serious and holy advice, in the words that I have read: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee...”

Some, I say, by the “right eye” and the “right hand” understand our beloved lusts. It is the usage of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures in a figurative way to express corruption by the parts and members of our bodies...Although all sins are our own, yet there are some sins that in a more especial manner may be called ours, namely, our right-eye sins and our right-hand sins. Or, if you will, every man hath his proper, particular iniquity, his *beloved* sin...And the handling of this doctrine will suit the case that is my task...namely, “How may beloved lusts be discovered and mortified?”...

1. It may be known by the loves and tender respects the sinner bears unto this sin. Strong love, for the most part, hath but one single

object. Affections are like the sunbeams in a burning-glass:¹ the more united they are in one point, the more fervent. A wicked man hath a particular affection for his particular lust. As Abraham cried, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” (Gen 17:18), so a wicked man, “Oh, that this sin may be spared!” This is his Benjamin (Gen 42:36). The soul is ready to say, “Here is one sin [that] must be plucked out, and here is another sin [that] must be cut off; must this beloved lust die *also*? All these things are against me.” The sinner seems to repent of sin and to condemn sin and himself for sin. But when the time of execution comes, the man is very tenderhearted: here is a reprieve for this sin and there is a pardon for another sin. Oh, it goes against him to cut the throat of his darling lust!...And if it fall out that his beloved sin die a natural death—if the adulterer, for instance, cannot actually engage in bodily uncleanness as formerly upon the account of old age—he follows it to the grave, as we do our dear friends, and heartily mourns that he and his dear lust must part.

2. It may be known thus: that sin that distracts us most in holy duties is our beloved sin. You may know that cold is natural to water, and it likes that quality best: let it be made never so hot, it will be still working itself to its own proper temper.² Souls possibly may sometimes be warmed at an ordinance;³ but they quickly cool again and are still working towards their proper lust, the sin they like best...The people of God themselves are tainted with this. Pride was the disciples’ master-sin. Whilst they were healing diseases and casting devils out of other men’s bodies, the proud devil was stirring in their own souls. Our Savior gives them a rebuke for that: “In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luk 10:20).

3. It may be known by its domination, its commanding power over all other sins. Look, as there is a kind of government in hell (...Beelzebub is called “the prince of devils”), so in a wicked man’s soul, one sin or other is still uppermost and keeps the throne. All other sins do, as it were, bow the knee to this sin, hold up the train of this sin, are obedient servants to this sin. It says to one, “Go,” and it goes and to another, “Come,” and it comes. For instance, if *covetousness* be the beloved sin, lying, deceiving, and injurious dealing will

¹ **burning-glass** – a lens by which the rays of the sun may be concentrated on an object to burn it if combustible.

² **it will...temper** – the water will be working its way back to its normal temperature.

³ **ordinance** – the Lord’s Supper, baptism, the hearing of the Word, etc.

serve that. If *ambition*, temporizing⁴ and sinful compliance⁵ will serve that. If *adultery*, sinful wasting of time, estate, and body will serve that. If *vainglory*⁶ be the Pharisees' great sin (Mat 23), devouring widows' houses under pretence of long prayers will serve that...In a word, the sinner hath the curse of Ham, as it were, pronounced upon him: "A servant of servants" is he (Gen 9:25). His other sins are servants to his beloved sin, and he himself is a slave to them all.

4. That sin that conscience in a particular manner doth chide⁷ a man for is likely his particular sin. The Greek word for *conscience*...signifies "a joint knowledge" or "knowledge with another." It takes notice of things together with God. Conscience is God's deputy, God's spy, God's intelligencer⁸ (pardon the word) in our bosoms, an exact notary⁹ of whatever we think or do, a co-witness with God, as St. Paul is bold to call it (Rom 9:1). Now, wouldst thou know thy beloved sin? Harken to the voice of conscience. Doth that condemn thee for pride, for passion, for worldliness, for persecuting the ways of God? Oh, remember, it is God's viceroy.¹⁰ Honor it so far as to weigh and consider thoroughly what it saith...

5. It may be known by being impatient of reproof. Herod hears John Baptist gladly, until he preached against his Herodias. This is a "touch me not"...the sinner shrinks when he is touched in the sore place. The eye is a tender part and apt to be offended if you meddle with it. This is the reason why people are enraged against a powerful, soul-searching, soul-saving ministry. Most men are for mountebanks and quacksalvers¹¹ that make use altogether of lenitives and healing plasters;¹² but as for your faithful surgeons, that, according to art, will probe, search, and cleanse the wound, they cannot away with¹³ them! "I hate him," saith Ahab of Micaiah, "he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1Ki 22:8). Only I shall add this: that man, especially that minister, that reproves another for his sins had need to be blameless as much as may be himself...That man that hath a beam

⁴ **temporizing** – to use delaying tactics to gain time.

⁵ **sinful compliance** – sinful tendency to yield to the will of others.

⁶ **vainglory** – unwarranted pride in one's accomplishments or character.

⁷ **chide** – to scold by way of reproof or rebuke.

⁸ **intelligencer** – secret agent; messenger.

⁹ **notary** – observer.

¹⁰ **viceroy** – governor of a country or province who rules as the representative of his or her king or sovereign.

¹¹ **mountebanks...quacksalvers** – flamboyant deceivers, who attract customers with tricks; persons who pretend to have a knowledge of medicine; charlatans and quacks.

¹² **lenitives...plasters** – remedies that ease pain and soothing applications.

¹³ **away with** – put up with; tolerate.

in his own eye is not likely to pull out the mote that is in his brother's.

6. It may be known by this: it makes a man notoriously partial in his own case. David could allow himself another man's wife and could condemn one to death for taking away another man's lamb.

7. It may be known by the covers, cloaks, and fair pretences that the sinner hath for this sin. Uncleaness and intemperance are "but tricks of youth and sowing his wild oats." Luxury is "magnificence." Covetousness is "good [stewardship]." Pride is "a piece of nobleness and grandeur of spirit," yea, (which is more), it is "humility." You have some that disparage themselves in company, and they call this "humility" when, in truth, it is the height of their spirits...Beware of speaking anything towards the justification of yourselves in any way of wickedness...

8. If there be any one sin more than another that the soul doth readily close with, that is its beloved sin, its right-eye sin or its right-hand sin. Samson, when all the world could not take away his strength, is easily persuaded by Delilah. See how Solomon expresses the harlot's dealing with the young man: "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him" (Pro 7:21). The most she could do was to flatter him; and yet, notwithstanding, it is said, "She forced him." Sin works altogether by enticement: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jam 1:14). Yet it is so powerful, that it amounts to a force, as the request of a king amounts unto a command.

9. That sin which a man wishes were not sin is like to be his beloved sin. The case of the young man in the Gospel is considerable to this purpose. Saith our Savior, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful" (Mat 19:21-22), that is, he was very much troubled that there was such a truth as this: The world for Christ's sake was to be parted with. So, Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." "Oh," saith the fool, "that there was no God! That there was no heaven! That there was no hell!" Atheism was the beloved sin in that case. First men wish there were no Deity, and then they judge so and say so...

10. That sin which we think of first in the morning and last in the evening is like to be our beloved sin...A beloved lust is usually the sinner's first and last: he gives it entertainment first in the morning

and takes his leave of it last in the evening. Yea, this darling sin must be entertained and made much on in the bedchamber. The Psalmist, speaking of a wicked man, tells us, “He deviseth mischief upon his bed” (Psa 36:4). For the most part, that is a very friend that we admit to our bedsides.

11. That sin which most infests us and troubles us in our solitudes and retirements is our beloved sin. My meaning is, when a man is alone, in his closet, or in the fields, and his thoughts run adrift, that sin which of themselves they move towards and close with, that may be his beloved sin...O Christian! Mark the workings of thy heart in private, and thou mayest possibly make some discoveries. When a man retires himself into some solitary place, it is usually absurd to trouble him. It is a friend, indeed, that falls in with him and offers his company in that case. That sin is more than ordinarily beloved by us that interposes in our privacies.

12. And, lastly, that sin that we are willing to endure greatest hardships and sufferings for is our beloved sin. For instance, suppose *covetousness* be the darling sin: What base, absurd, unreasonable offices will it put a man upon! How scraping,¹⁴ niggardly,¹⁵ and dunghill-like will that man live in his town or in his parish and expose himself to scorn and contempt from every one that knows him! Suppose *ambition* be the beloved sin: how will a man in that case swear, and forswear,¹⁶ and temporize, and, like the boatmen, look one way and row another; almost anything for preferment! If *uncleanness* be the man’s particular sin, how will he destroy his body, disgrace his name, overthrow his estate for the gratifying of his lust! I dare aver that the worst and basest drudgery imaginable—to scour kettles and dishes, to tug at the oar, to dig at the mine—are honorable employments in comparison of this.

From “How May Beloved Lusts Be Discovered and Mortified?” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, Vol. 1, reprinted by Richard Owen Roberts, Publisher.

Benjamin Needler (1620-1682): Non-conformist minister; an able preacher remembered by Richard Baxter as “a very humble, grave, and peaceable divine”; born in Laleham, Middlesex, England.



¹⁴ **scraping** – money-grubbing.

¹⁵ **niggardly** – miserly.

¹⁶ **forswear** – to deny or repudiate an oath.

ONLY A CHRISTIAN CAN MORTIFY SIN

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?—Romans 6:2

BEFORE I can live a Christian life, I must be a Christian. Am I such? I ought to know this. Do I know it, and in knowing it, know whose I am and whom I serve? Or is my title to the name still questionable, still a matter of anxious debate and search?

If I am to live as a son of God, I must be a son, and I must know it. Otherwise my life will be an artificial imitation, a piece of barren mechanism, performing certain excellent movements, but destitute of vital heat and force. Here many fail. They try to live like sons in order to make themselves sons, forgetting God's simple plan for attaining sonship at once: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (Joh 1:12).

The faith of many among us is, after all, but an *attempt* to believe; their repentance but an *attempt* to repent; and in so doing they only use words that they have learned from others...God's description of a Christian man is clear and well-defined. It has about it so little of the vague and wide that one wonders how any mistake should have arisen on this point, and so many dubious, so many false claims put in.

A Christian is one who "has tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1Pe 2:3); who has been "begotten again unto a lively hope" (1Pe 1:3); who has been "quickened together with Christ" (Eph 2:5); made a partaker of Christ (Heb 3:14); a partaker of the divine nature (2Pe 1:4); who "has been delivered from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4).

Such is God's description of one who has found his way to the cross and is warranted in taking to himself the Antiochian name of "Christian," or the apostolic name of "saint." Of good about himself, previous to his receiving the record of the free forgiveness, he cannot speak. He remembers nothing lovable that could have recommended him to God, nothing fit that could have qualified him for the divine favor, save that he needed life. All that he can say for himself is that he has "known and believed the love that God hath to us" (1Jo 4:16), and in believing has found that which makes him not merely a happy, but a *holy* man. He has discovered the fountainhead of a holy life.

Have I then found my way to the cross? If so, I am safe. I have the everlasting life. The first true touch of that cross has secured for me the eternal blessing. I am in the hands of Christ, and none shall pluck me out (Joh 10:28).

The cross makes us whole: Not all at once indeed, but it does the work effectually. Before we reached it, we were not “whole,” but broken and scattered, nay, without a center toward which to gravitate. The cross forms that center, and in doing so it draws together the disordered fragments of our being. It “unites our heart” (Psa 86:11), producing a wholeness or unity which no object of less powerful attractiveness could accomplish. It is a wholeness or unity that, beginning with the individual, reproduces itself on a larger scale, but with the same center of gravitation, in the church of God.

Of spiritual health, the cross is the source: From it there goes forth the “virtue” (*dunamis*, the power, Luk 6:19) that heals all maladies, be they slight or deadly. For “by his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5); and in Him we find “the tree of life” with its healing leaves (Rev 22:2). Golgotha has become Gilead, with its skillful Physician and its “bruised” balm (Jer 8:22; Isa 53:5). Old Latimer¹ says well regarding the woman whom Christ cured: “She believed that Christ was such a healthful man that she should be sound as soon as she might touch Him” (from Mat 9:20). The “whole head [was] sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isa 1:5); but now the sickness is gone, and the vigor comes again to the fainting heart. The look, or rather the Object looked at, has done its work (Isa 45:22); the serpent of brass has accomplished that which no earthly medicines could effect. Not to us can it now be said, “Thou hast no healing medicines” (Jer 30:13), for the word of the great Healer is, “Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth” (Jer 33:6). Thus, it is by the abundance of that peace and truth, revealed to us in the cross, that our cure is wrought.

The cure is not perfected in an hour. But, as the sight of the cross begins it, so does it complete it at last. The pulses of new health now beat in all our veins. Our whole being recognizes the potency of the divine medicine, and our diseases yield to it.

Yes, the cross heals: It possesses the double virtue of healing sin and quickening holiness. It makes all the fruits of the flesh to wither, while it cherishes and ripens the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, tem-

¹ **Hugh Latimer** (c. 1485/90-1555) – famous Anglican reformer and martyr.

perance” (Gal 5:22). By this, the hurt of the soul is not “healed slightly,” but truly and thoroughly. It acts like the fresh balm of southern air to one whose constitution the frost and damp of the far north had undermined. It gives new tone and energy to our faculties, a new bent and aim to all our purposes, and a new elevation to all our hopes and longings. It gives the deathblow to self; it mortifies our members that are upon the earth. It crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts. Thus, looking continually to the cross, each day, as at the first, we are made sensible of the restoration of our soul’s health; evil loosens its hold, while good strengthens and ripens.

It is not merely that we “glory in the cross” (Gal 6:14), but we draw strength from it. It is the place of weakness, for there Christ “was crucified through weakness” (2Co 13:4); but it is, notwithstanding, the fountainhead of power to us. For as out of death came forth life, so out of weakness came forth strength. This is strength, not for one thing, but for everything. It is strength for activity or for endurance, for holiness as well as for work. He that would be holy or useful must keep near the cross. The cross is the secret of power and the pledge of victory. With it, we fight and overcome. No weapon can prosper against it, nor enemy prevail. With it, we meet the fightings without as well as the fears within. With it, we war the good warfare, we wrestle with principalities and powers, we “withstand” and we “stand” (Eph 6:11-13); we fight the good fight, we finish the course, we keep the faith (2Ti 4:7).

Standing by the cross, we become imitators of the crucified One. We seek to be like Him, men who please not themselves (Rom 15:3), who do the Father’s will, counting not our life dear to us, who love our neighbors as ourselves and the brethren as He loved us; who pray for our enemies; who revile not again when reviled; who threaten not when we suffer, but commit ourselves to Him that judgeth righteously; who live not to ourselves and who die not to ourselves; who are willing to be of “no reputation” (Phi 2:7), but to “suffer shame for his name” (Act 5:41), to take the place and name of “servant,” nay, to count “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb 11:26). “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin [has died to sin as in Rom 6:10]; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (1Pe 4:1-2).

Standing by the cross, we realize the meaning of such a text as this: “Knowing this, that our old man [was] crucified with him, that the

body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). The crucifixion of our old man, the destruction of the body of sin, and deliverance from the bondage of sin are strikingly linked to one another and linked, all of them, to the cross of Christ. Or we read the meaning of another: “I [have been] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Here the one Paul—not two Pauls or two persons—speaks throughout as completely identified with Christ and His cross. It is not one part of Paul in this clause and another in that. It is the one whole Paul throughout, who is crucified, dies, lives!

Like Isaac, he has been received from the dead “in a figure” (Heb 11:19); and as Abraham would, after the strange Moriah transaction, look on Isaac as given back from the dead, so would Jehovah reckon and treat this Paul as a risen man! Isaac would be the same Isaac, and yet not the same; so Paul is the same Paul, and yet not the same! He has passed through something which alters his state legally and his character morally; he is new. Instead of the first Adam, who was of the earth, earthy (1Co 15:47), he has the last Adam, Who is the Lord from heaven, for his guest: “Christ liveth in him”; “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (just as he says, “yet not I, but the grace of God in me”); and so he lives the rest of his life on earth, holding fast his connection with the crucified Son of God and His love. Or again, we gather light upon that text: “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24); and that: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal 6:14).

Standing by the cross, we realize the death of the Surety, and discover more truly the meaning of passages such as these: “Ye are dead [ye died], and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Ye died with Christ from “the rudiments of the world” (Col 2:20). His death (and yours with Him) dissolved your connection with these. “If one died for all, then [all died]: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2Co 5:14b-15). “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom 14:9).

Romans 6:7-12, “He that [has died] is freed [*justified*] from sin [i.e., *He has paid the penalty*]. Now if we be dead with Christ [or *since we died with Christ*], we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing

that Christ [having been] raised from the dead dieth no more [*He has no second penalty to pay, no second death to undergo—Heb 9:27-28*]; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once [*His death finished His sin-bearing work once for all*]: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body [*even in your body—Rom 12:1*], that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

There is something peculiarly solemn about these passages. They are very unlike, both in tone and words, the light speech which some indulge in when speaking of the gospel and its forgiveness. Ah, this is the language of one who has in him the profound consciousness that severance from sin is one of the mightiest, as well as most blessed, things in the universe. He has learned how deliverance from condemnation may be found and all legal claims against him met. But, more than this, he has learned how the grasp of sin can be unclasped, how its serpent-folds can be unwound, how its impurities can be erased, how he can defy its wiles and defeat its strength, how he can be holy! This is, to him, of discoveries one of the greatest and most gladdening. Forgiveness itself is precious, chiefly as a step to holiness. How any one, after reading statements such as those of the apostle, can speak of sin, pardon, or holiness without awe seems difficult to understand. Or how anyone can [think] that the forgiveness which the believing man finds at the cross of Christ is a release from the obligation to live a holy life is no less incomprehensible.

It is true that sin remains in the saint, and it is equally true that this sin does not bring condemnation back to him. But there is a way of stating this that would almost lead to the inference that watchfulness has thus been rendered less necessary; that holiness is not now so great an urgency; that sin is not so terrible as formerly. To tell a sinning saint that no amount of sin can alter the perfect standing before God, into which the blood of Christ brings us, may not be technically or theologically incorrect; but this mode of putting the truth is not that of the Epistle to the Romans or Ephesians. It sounds almost like, “*Continue in sin because grace abounds,*” and it is not scriptural language. The apostolic way of putting the point is that of 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1).

Thus, then, that which cancels the curse provides the purity. The cross not only pardons, but it purifies. From it there gushes out the

double fountain of peace and holiness. It heals, unites, strengthens, quickens, blesses...But we have our cross to bear, and our whole life is to be a bearing of it. It is not Christ's cross that we are to carry: that is too heavy for us. Besides, it has been done once for all. But our cross remains; and much of a Christian life consists in a true, honest, decided bearing of it...The cross on which we are crucified with Christ, and the cross which we carry are different things, yet they both point in one direction and lead us along one way. They both protest against sin and summon to holiness. They both "condemn the world" and demand separation from it. They set us upon ground so high and so unearthly that the questions which some raise as to the expediency of conformity to the world's ways are answered as soon as they are put; and the sophistries of the flesh, pleading in behalf of gaiety and revelry, never for a moment perplex us. The kingdom is in view, the way is plain, the cross is on our shoulders; and shall we turn aside after fashions, frivolities, pleasures, and unreal beauties, even were they all as harmless as men say they are?

From *God's Way of Holiness* reprinted and available as a paperback book from Chapel Library.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister whose poems, hymns, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century; born in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Now, sundry things are required unto and comprised in this fighting against sin: [1] To know that a man hath 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. [2] To labor to be acquainted with the ways, wiles, methods, advantages, and occasions of its success is the beginning of this warfare. [3] To load it daily with all the things...that are grievous, killing, and destructive to it is the height of this contest...Now, whilst the soul is in this condition, whilst it is thus dealing, it is certainly uppermost: sin is under the sword and dying...Now, I say, 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, when he can in a quiet, sedate frame of spirit find out and fight against sin and have success against it—then sin is mortified in some considerable measure; and, notwithstanding all its opposition, a man may have peace with God all his days.

The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power.—*John Owen*

DIRECTIONS FOR MORTIFICATION

John Owen (1616-1683)

SET FAITH AT WORK ON CHRIST FOR THE KILLING OF THY SIN: His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.

But thou wilt say, “How shall faith act itself on Christ for this end and purpose?” I say, sundry ways:

(1) **By faith fill thy soul with a due consideration of that provision which is laid up in Jesus Christ for this end and purpose, that all thy lusts, this very lust wherewith thou art entangled, may be mortified.** By faith, ponder on this: though thou art no way able in or by thyself to get the conquest over thy distemper,¹ though thou art even weary of contending and art utterly ready to faint, yet there is enough in Jesus Christ to yield thee relief (Phi 4:13)...In thy greatest distress and anguish, consider that fullness of grace, those riches, those treasures of strength, might, and help that are laid up in Him for our support (Joh 1:16; Col 1:19). Let them come into and abide in thy mind. Consider that He is exalted and made a Prince and a Savior to give repentance unto Israel (Act 5:31), and if to give repentance, to give mortification, without which the other is not nor can be. Christ tells us that we obtain purging grace by abiding in Him (Joh 15:3).

To act faith upon the fullness that is in Christ for our supply is an eminent² way of abiding in Christ, for both our insition³ and abode is by faith (Rom 11:19-20). Let then thy 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. 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 a thing of naught.⁴ Many persuasions have I had that I had gotten the victory and should be delivered. But I am deceived, so that I plainly see that without some eminent succor⁵ and assistance, I am

¹ **distemper** – disease; ailment; figurative here for sin.

² **eminent** – important; especially valuable.

³ **insition** – inserting a shoot or twig in grafting; engrafting.

⁴ **naught** – complete failure.

⁵ **eminent succor** – help in a remarkable degree.

lost and shall be prevailed on to an utter relinquishment of God. Yet though this be my state and condition, let the hands that hang down be lifted up and the feeble knees be strengthened. Behold, the Lord Christ that hath all fullness of grace in His heart, all fullness of power in His hand, is able to slay all these His enemies. 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...He can make the dry, parched ground of my soul to become a pool and my thirsty, barren heart as springs of water. Yea, He can make this habitation of dragons, this heart, so full of abominable lusts and fiery temptations, to be a place for grass and fruit to Himself (Isa 35:7).”

So God staid⁶ Paul under his temptation with the consideration of the sufficiency of His grace: “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9)...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 thee strength and deliverance...

(2) Raise up thy heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ. Relief in this case from Christ is like the prophet’s vision: “For the vision 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 thee whilst thou art under thy trouble and perplexity, yet it shall surely come in the appointed time of the Lord Jesus, which is the best season. If then thou canst raise up thy heart to a settled expectation of relief from Jesus Christ...thy soul shall be satisfied. He will assuredly deliver thee. He will slay the lust, and thy 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)...Ought not all our expectations to this purpose to be on Christ alone? Let this then be fixed upon thy heart: if thou hast not relief from Him, thou shalt never have any. All ways, endeavors, contendings that are not animated by this expectation of relief from Christ and Him only are to no purpose [and] will do thee no good...Now, farther to engage thee to this expectation,

(1) Consider His mercifulness, tenderness, and kindness as He is our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Assuredly, He pities thee in thy distress. Saith He, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (Isa 66:13). He hath the tenderness of a mother

⁶ **staid** – supported; sustained.

to a sucking child. “Wherefore in all things it behoved⁷ 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 succour 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”...He is able, having suffered and been tempted, to break through all dissuasions⁸ to the contrary to relieve poor, tempted souls: “He is able to help”...He can now be moved to help, having been so tempted.

[Even so, 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.”⁹ “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, verse 15...I shall freely say, this one thing of establishing the soul by faith in expectation of relief from Jesus Christ, on the account of His mercifulness as our High Priest, will be more available to the ruin of thy lust and distemper and have a better and speedier issue than all the [most rigid] means of self-maceration¹⁰ that ever any of the sons of men engaged themselves unto. 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.

(2) Consider His faithfulness Who hath promised, which may raise thee up and confirm thee in this waiting in an expectation of relief. He hath promised to relieve in such cases, and He will fulfill His word to the utmost. God tells us that His covenant with us is like the “ordinances” of heaven—the sun, moon, and stars—which have their certain courses (Jer 31:36). Thence David said that he watched for

⁷ **behoved** – was necessary.

⁸ **dissuasions** – persuasions not to do something.

⁹ **seasonable help** – help occurring at the right time.

¹⁰ **self-maceration** – wasting away of one’s body, especially by starvation or fasting.

relief from God as one watched for the morning (Psa 130:6)—a thing that will certainly come in its appointed season. So will be thy relief from Christ. It will come in its season, as the dew and rain upon the parched ground; for faithful is He Who hath promised...He that expects anything from a man applies himself to the ways and means whereby it may be obtained. The beggar that expects an alms¹¹ lies at his door or in his way from whom he doth expect it. The way whereby and the means wherein Christ communicates Himself is, and are, His ordinances ordinarily. He that expects 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...to this end of mortifying sin, a man will assuredly be interested in it all by this expectation of relief from Christ...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:

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,¹² yea, eminent end of the death of Christ, which shall assuredly be accomplished by it. He died to destroy the works of the devil. Whatever came upon our natures by his first temptation, whatever receives strength in our persons by his daily suggestions, *Christ died to destroy it all.* “Who 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 His aim and intendment—wherein *He will not fail*—in His giving Himself for us. That we might be freed from the power of our sins and purified from all our defiling lusts was His design. “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 by virtue of His death in various and several degrees *shall be accomplished.* Hence, our washing, purging, and cleansing is everywhere ascribed to His blood (1Jo 1:7; Heb 1:3; Rev 1:5). That being sprinkled on us purges our consciences from “dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). This is that we aim at, this we are in pursuit of: that our consciences may be purged from dead works that they

¹¹ **alms** – a charitable donation of money or goods.

¹² **peculiarly/peculiar** – especially; particular.

may be rooted out, destroyed, and have place in us no more. This shall certainly be brought about by the death of Christ. There will virtue go out from thence to this purpose.

Indeed, all supplies of the Spirit, all communications of grace and power are from hence...Thus, the apostle states it...“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:2). *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—how shall we live therein?...“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3). We have in baptism an evidence of our implantation into Christ;¹³ we are baptized into Him. But what of Him are we baptized into an interest in? “His death,” saith he. If indeed we are baptized into Christ and beyond outward profession, we are baptized into His death. The explication of this, of one being baptized into the death of Christ, the apostle gives us: “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 (6:4)...This is that the apostle intends: Christ by His death—destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us—hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.

Secondly, then act faith on the death of Christ, and that under these two notions First, in expectation of *power*. Secondly, in endeavors for *conformity*...Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as He is set forth dying and crucified for us. Look on Him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring Him in that condition into thy heart by faith; apply His blood so shed to thy corruptions: do this daily.

From “The Mortification of Sin in Believers” in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 6, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust.

John Owen (1616-1683): Congregationalist preacher and author, known as “The Prince of the Puritans”; born in Oxfordshire, Stadhams, England.



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 bellies of his lusts.—*John Owen*

¹³ **implantation...Christ** – union through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

MORTIFYING SIN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 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 8:12-13

SANCTIFICATION is a process in which a man himself plays a part, in which he is called upon to do something “through the Spirit,” Who is in him. We now proceed to consider what it is exactly that he has to do. The exhortation, the injunction, is “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body...” The Christian is called upon to mortify the deeds of the body.

We must deal first with the word *body*, which means our physical body, our physical frame, as it did also in the tenth verse. It does not mean “flesh.” Even the great Dr. John Owen goes astray at this point and deals with it as the “flesh” and not as the “body.”¹ But the apostle who has talked so much about the “flesh” earlier quite deliberately talks about the “body.” He has done so in verses 10 and 11, and he did so in the twelfth verse of the sixth chapter. He is referring to this physical body in which sin still remains, but which is one day going to be raised “incorruptible”² and glorified, to become like the glorified body of our blessed Lord and Savior Himself. I emphasize again that we must be clear about this matter because it is so liable to be misunderstood. The teaching is not that the human body is inherently sinful or that matter is inherently sinful. There have been heretics who have taught that error known as *dualism*. The New Testament, on the contrary, teaches that man was made [good] in body, soul, and spirit. It does not teach that matter has always been evil, and that therefore the body has always been evil. There *was* a time when the body was...entirely free from sin; but when man fell, when man sinned, the whole of him fell, and he became sinful in body, mind, and spirit. But we have seen that in the new birth, man’s spirit is already delivered. He receives new life: “the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom 8:10). But still “the body is dead because of sin” (8:10). Such is New Testament teaching! In other words, though the

¹ Pink takes a slightly different perspective in article 1, *The Doctrine of Mortification*.

² **incorruptible** – incapable of undergoing physical corruption; that which cannot decay or perish.

Christian is regenerated,³ sin still remains in his mortal dying body. Hence, the problem of living the Christian life, hence the fight and the struggle against sin as long as we are left in this world; for the body is still the seat and the instrument of sin and corruption. Our bodies are not yet delivered. They shall be delivered, but so far sin remains in them.

The apostle, as we have seen, makes this quite clear. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, he says, “I keep under my body,” for the body prompts us to evil deeds. It is not that the instincts of the body are in and of themselves sinful. The instincts are natural and normal; and they are not inherently sinful. But the residual sin within us is always trying to turn the natural instincts in evil directions. It tries to turn them into “inordinate⁴ affections,” to exaggerate them, tries to make us eat too much, drink too much, tries to make us indulge all our instincts too much; so that they become “inordinate.” Or to look at the matter from the opposite angle, this sinful principle tries to hinder us from giving attention to the process of discipline and self-control to which we are so constantly called in the pages of Scripture. Sin remaining in the body tends to act in this way. Hence, the apostle speaks of “the deeds of the body.” It tries to turn the natural and the normal into something sinful and evil.

The term *mortify* really explains itself. “To mortify” is to deaden, to put to death...so the exhortation is that we must “deaden,” put an end to the “deeds of the body.” This is the great New Testament exhortation in connection with sanctification from the practical standpoint, and it is addressed to all Christian people.

How is this work to be done?...The apostle makes it plain. “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body”—“through the Spirit”! The Spirit is mentioned particularly, of course, because His presence and His work are the particular and peculiar mark of true Christianity. This is what differentiates Christianity from morality, from “legalism” and false Puritanism—“through the Spirit”! The Holy Spirit, as we have seen, is in us as Christians. You cannot be a Christian without Him. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit of God is in you, and He is working in you. He enables us, He gives us strength, He gives us power. He “mediates” to us the great salvation the Lord Jesus Christ has worked out for us and enables us to work it out. The Christian must therefore never complain of want of ability

³ **regenerated** – spiritually changed by the power of the Holy Spirit; born again.

⁴ **inordinate** – excessive; unrestrained.

and power. For a Christian to say, “I cannot do it” is to deny the Scripture. A man who has the Holy Spirit residing in him must never utter such an expression: it is a denial of the truth concerning him.

A Christian, as the Apostle John says in the 16th verse of the first chapter of his Gospel, is one who can say, “Of his fulness have we received.” Later on in chapter 15, believers are described as branches in the true Vine; so we must never say that we have no power. Certainly the devil is active in the world, and he is mighty in power; but “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1Jo 4:4). Or take again that important statement in the First Epistle of John, chapter 5 vv. 18 and 19: “We know that whosoever is born of God doth not keep on committing sin.” Such is the meaning of the “sinneth not” of the Authorized Version. It is the present-continuous tense: “We know that whosoever is born of God does not keep on sinning.” Why not? “But he that is begotten of God”—that is the Lord Jesus Christ—“keepeth him, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” This, says John, is the truth about every Christian. The Christian does not go on living in sin because Christ is living in him, and that evil one cannot touch him. Not only does he not control him, he cannot even touch him. The believer does not come under the power of the evil one. And then to press it right home, John says in verse 19, “We know that we are of God,” but as for the world, “the whole world lieth in wickedness.” The world is in the arms and in the bosom of the evil one, who controls it...He has the world and the men who belong to the world entirely in his grip and under his control, and such men are his utterly helpless victims. There is no purpose in telling such people to “mortify the deeds of the body”; they cannot do so because they are in the grip of the devil. But the Christian’s case is far different; the Christian is “of God,” and the evil one cannot even touch him. He can shout at him, he may frighten him occasionally; but he cannot touch him, still less control him.

These are typical New Testament statements about the Christian; and as we realize that the Spirit is in us, we shall experience their power. We are called upon then to use and to exercise the power that is in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit”—who is resident in you—“do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” The exhortation is to exercise the power that is in us “through the Spirit.” The Spirit is power, and He is dwelling in us; and so we are urged to exercise the power that is in us.

But how does this work out in practice?...To begin, we have to understand our position spiritually, for many of our troubles are due to the fact that we do not realize, and do not remember, who we are and what we are as Christians. People complain that they have no power, and that they cannot do this or that. What they really need to be told is not that they are absolutely hopeless, and that they must “hand it over,” but, rather, what all Christians are told in the 1st chapter of the Second Epistle of Peter in verses 2 to 4: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” *Everything* that “pertains unto life and godliness” has been given us “through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” And again: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [*by means of these exceeding great and precious promises*] ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Yet Christian people moan and complain that they have no strength. The answer to such people is “All things that pertain unto life and godliness have been given you. Stop moaning and grumbling and complaining. Get up and use what is in you. If you are a Christian the power is in you by the Holy Spirit; you are not hopeless.” But the Apostle Peter does not leave it at that. In the ninth verse of that same chapter of his Second Epistle, he says, “He that lacketh these things”—in other words, the man who does not do the things he has been exhorting him to do—“is blind and cannot see afar off.” He is shortsighted, “and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” He has not got a true view of the Christian life. He is talking and living as if he were still unregenerate. He says, “I cannot continue as a Christian; it is too much for me.” Peter urges such a man to realize the truth about himself. He needs to be awakened; he needs to have his eyes opened and his memory refreshed. He needs to be up and doing, instead of moaning over his deficiencies.

Furthermore, we have to realize that if we are guilty of sin we are “grieving the Holy Spirit of God” Who is in us. Every time we sin, it is not so much that we sin and become miserable that chiefly matters, but that we are grieving the Holy Spirit of God Who is dwelling in our body. How often do we think of that? I find that when people come to me about this matter they always talk about *themselves*— “my failure.” “I am constantly falling into this sin.” “This sin is getting me down.” They talk entirely about themselves. They do not talk

about their relationship to the Holy Spirit, and for this reason: the man who realizes that the main trouble about his sinful life is that he is grieving the Holy Spirit, stops doing so at once. The moment a man sees that *that* is his real problem, he deals with it. He is no longer chiefly concerned about his own feelings; when he realizes that he is grieving the Holy Spirit of God, he takes immediate action.

Another most important consideration under this general heading is that we must always keep the ultimate goal in sight. Peter emphasizes this in that same first chapter: “If ye do these things,” he says, “ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:10b-11). If you do these things that I am exhorting you to do, he says, your death, when it comes, will be wonderful: you will not just somehow enter into the kingdom of God, you will have an “abundant entrance.” It will be a triumphant procession, the gates will be opened, and there will be great rejoicing! He is not referring to our present salvation, but to our final glorification,⁵ our entry “into everlasting habitations” (Luk 16:9). So we must keep our eye on that goal. *Our main trouble is that we are always looking at ourselves and at the world.* If we thought of ourselves more and more as pilgrims of eternity (which is what we are), our whole outlook would be transformed. Paul has stated that here [in Romans 8:11]: Keep your eye on that, he says in effect; keep your eye on the goal. John says the same thing in his first Epistle: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1Jo 3:2-3). The cause of most of our troubles as Christians is that we live too much to this world and in time. We persist in forgetting that we are only “pilgrims and strangers” here. We belong to heaven: our citizenship is in heaven (Phi 3:20), and we are going there. If we but kept that in the forefront of our minds, this problem of our fight against sin would take on a different aspect...

But we move on now from the general to the particular, reminding ourselves as we do so that all is done “through the Spirit,” and with a Spirit-enlightened mind. What have we to do in particular? The

⁵ **glorification** – the last stage of salvation, namely, the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Jesus Christ and the believer’s entrance into the consummated Kingdom of God. In glorification, believers attain complete conformity to the image and likeness of the glorified Christ and are freed from both physical and spiritual defect.

apostle's teaching can best be considered under two main headings—direct or negative, and indirect or positive.

Under the direct or negative heading, the first thing is that the Christian must “abstain from sin.” It is as simple and direct as that! “Dearly beloved,” says Peter in his First Epistle chapter 2, verse 11, “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” That is as plain as a thing can be. There is no suggestion there of our being “absolutely hopeless” and that we must give up the struggle and “hand it all over” to the risen Lord. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from...”—stop doing it, stop it at once, never do it again! You have to be a total abstainer from these sins, these “fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” You have no right to say, “I am weak, I cannot, and temptation is powerful.” The answer of the New Testament is “Stop doing it.” You do not need a hospital and treatment; you need to pull yourself together and to realize who you are as “strangers and pilgrims.” “*Abstain from...*” You have no business to touch such things. Recall again the teaching of the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 4: “Let him that stole steal no more.” “Let no filthy communication proceed out of your mouth.” None of this foolish talking or jesting! Don't do it! Abstain! It is as simple as that and as practical as that. Stop it!

Secondly, and particularly, to quote the Apostle again in Ephesians 5:11-12: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.” Notice what he says: “*Have no fellowship with them.*” You must not only abstain from such things, you must have no fellowship with people who do such things or with that mode of life. “Have no fellowship with them, but rather reprove them.” Your ruling principle should be not to associate with people of that type. To do so is bad for you and will do you harm...We are to have no fellowship with evil, but to shy away from it, and to keep as far away from it as we can.

Another term is “Keep under” (1Co 9:27). “I keep under my body,” says the apostle. “Every man who strives for the mastery”—that is, who runs in races—disciplines himself. People who go into training for great athletic contests are very careful about their diet; they stop smoking and do not drink alcoholic beverages. How careful they are! And all because they want to win the prize! If they do that, says Paul, for those perishable crowns, how much more should we discipline *ourselves*...The body must be “kept under.” There is a hint as to how

this is to be done in our Lord's words in Luke 21:34. He says: "And take heed to yourselves"—He is talking to His followers—"lest at any time your hearts be over-charged with surfeiting,⁶ and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Do not eat or drink too much; do not be over-preoccupied with this world's affairs. Take sufficient food, take the right food; but do not be guilty of "surfeiting." If a man overindulges his body in food or drink or anything else, he will find it more and more difficult to live the sanctified Christian life and to mortify the deeds of the body. Avoid all such hindrances therefore, and lead a regular, disciplined, ordered life in every respect; otherwise, your body will become lethargic⁷ and heavy and dull and listless; and there is such an intimate connection between the body and the mind and the spirit that you will find great trouble in your spiritual warfare. "Keep the body under."

Another maxim used by the apostle in this Epistle to the Romans is found in chapter 13 at the 14th verse: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." If you want to mortify the deeds of the body, "do not make any provision for the flesh." What does that mean? We find very clear light as to the apostle's meaning in the first of the Psalms. Here is the prescription: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners." If you want to live this godly life and mortify the deeds of the body, do not spend your time standing at street corners because if you do so, you are likely to fall into sin. If you stand where sin is likely to be passing by, do not be surprised if you go home miserable and unhappy because you have fallen again. Do not "stand in the way of sinners." Still less must you "sit in the seat of the scornful." If you go to such places, it will not be surprising if you fall. If you know that certain people have a bad influence over you, avoid them, keep clear of them. You may say, "But I mix with them in order that I may help them; and yet I find, every time, that they lead me to sin." If that is so, you are not in a position to help them...

The wise man says in the Book of Job, "I made a covenant with my eyes" (Job 31:1). "Look straight ahead," he says, "do not look to the right or to the left; watch your wandering eyes, those eyes that seem to move almost automatically, and that look for things that entice and incite to sin." "Make a covenant with your eyes," says this man; agree

⁶ **surfeiting** – gluttonous indulgence in eating or drinking.

⁷ **lethargic** – characterized by sluggishness and inactivity.

not to look at anything that tends to lead you into sin. If it was important in ancient days, how much more so today, when we have newspapers, cinemas, hoardings,⁸ television sets, and so on! If ever men needed to make covenants with their eyes, it is now. Be careful what you read. Certain newspapers, books, and journals, if you read them, will harm you. Anything that you find does harm to you and lowers your resistance you must avoid. Do not look in their direction; have nothing to do with them...In God's Word, you are told to "mortify the deeds of the body," to "make no provision for the flesh." Thank God for a virile⁹ gospel; thank God for a gospel that tells us that we are now responsible beings in Christ, and which calls upon us to act in a way that glorifies the Savior. So "make no provision for the flesh."

My next point is of high importance: Deal with the first motions and movements of sin and temptation within you; deal with them the moment they appear. If you do not, you are undone. You will go down, as we are taught in the Epistle of James: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (1:13-15). The first movement is enticement, a slight stirring of lust and enticement. That is the point at which to deal with it. If you fail to deal with it at that stage, it will overcome you. Nip it in the bud; deal with it at once; never let it get even a moment's foothold. Do not accept it at all. Perhaps you feel inclined to say, "Ah well, I am not going to do the thing." Ah, but if you accept it in your mind, and begin to fondle it there, and entertain it in your imagination, you are already defeated. According to our Lord, you have sinned already. You need not actually commit the deed: to entertain it in your mind is enough. To allow it in your heart is sin in the sight of God, Who knows all about us and reads even what happens in the heart and the imagination. Nip it in the bud therefore, have no dealings with it, stop it at once, at the first movement, before this wretched process that is described by James begins to take place.

But remember this—and this can be our next point—that that does not mean *repression*. If you merely repress a temptation or this first motion of sin within you, it will probably come up again still more

⁸ **hoardings** – billboards.

⁹ **virile** – full of masculine energy or strength; not weak or effeminate.

strongly. To that extent, I agree with the modern psychology. Repression is always bad. “Well, what do you do?” asks someone. I answer: When you feel that first motion of sin, just pull yourself up, and say, “I am not having any dealings with this at all.” Expose the thing, and say, “This is evil, this is vileness, this is the thing that drove the first man out of Paradise.” Pull it out, look at it, denounce it, hate it for what it is; then you have really dealt with it. You must not merely push it back in a spirit of fear and in a timorous manner. Bring it out, expose it, and analyze it; and then denounce it for what it is until you hate it.

My last point under this heading is that if, nevertheless, you should fall into sin (and who does not?), do not heal yourself too easily, too quickly. Turn to 2 Corinthians 7 and read what Paul says about “godly sorrow that worketh repentance.” Once more bring out the thing you have done, look at it, analyze it, expose it, denounce it, hate it, and denounce yourself. But not in such a way as to plunge yourself into the depth of depression and despair! We always tend to go to extremes; we are either too superficial or too deep. We must not “heal the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly” (Jer 6: 14); but neither must we cast ourselves down into despair and gloom and say that it is all hopeless, that we cannot be Christians at all, and go back again under condemnation. That is equally wrong. We must avoid both extremes. Undertake an honest examination of yourself and what you have done, and utterly condemn yourself and your deed; but then realize that as you confess it to God, without any excuse whatsoever, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1: 9). If you do such a work “slightly,” you will fall into sin again; and if you set yourself down in a pit of depression, you will feel so hopeless that you will fall into more and more sin. An atmosphere of gloom and of failure leads to yet more failure. Do not fall into either of these errors, but attend to the work in the way in which the Spirit always instructs us to do it.

From *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17, The Sons of God*, pp. 132-144,
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www.banneroftruth.org

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century. Successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-68; born in Cardiff, Wales.

DANGERS OF NOT MORTIFYING SIN

Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690)

I IN AN UNMORTIFIED COURSE, YOU FRUSTRATE THE VERY END OF YOUR GRACES. Hath God implanted in you a noble, active, and divine principle that will certainly, in the end, prove victorious if it be employed? And will you—while lusts and temptations are overrunning your souls and making a prey of you—will you, I say, check it and keep it under a restraint? Grace hath in it a natural antipathy and repugnance¹ against sin and would, where it hath its free scope, naturally and necessarily destroy it. The apostle tells us, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17). And, what! Doth the Spirit sit down tame and quiet under such...opposition? No, saith he, “the Spirit” also lusteth “against the flesh.” It doth no sooner see a corruption begin to heave and stir in the heart, but it would be presently upon it. It would beat it down and keep it under, did not your deceitful hearts betray it or did they but concur with it. Now consider,

i. **Is not this a foul piece of ingratitude and disingenuousness² against God, the God of all grace?** He, seeing thy weakness and impotence to deal with those mighty corruptions that storm, rage, and domineer within thee, hath sent the auxiliaries and succors³ of His divine grace to aid thee. And thou either turnest treacherous and deliverest them up bound to be abused, yea, if possible to be slaughtered by thy lusts...

ii. **Is it not desperate madness and folly to neglect or hinder that, which would side with thee and fight for thee?** Alas! The quarrel is not grace’s, but thine; and it is no less than thine eternal salvation or thine eternal damnation about which this war is commenced. When corruption comes up against thee in a full body and the devil in the head of it leading it on, dost thou think thou canst of thyself stand against these many legions? Yet shall grace stand by and proffer⁴ thee a sure aid, and thou refuse or neglect it? What else is this, but to make void the use and office of grace and to be injurious to the goodness of God, Who hath therefore given thee grace to this very end that thou shouldst employ it against thy lusts?

¹ **antipathy** and **repugnance** – intense dislike; strong distaste.

² **disingenuousness** – giving a false impression of sincerity.

³ **auxiliaries** and **succors** – those who render assistance; aids in time of difficulty.

⁴ **proffer** – present before a person for acceptance.

2. **UNMORTIFIED SIN DOTH NOT ONLY FRUSTRATE THE END AND USE OF GRACE; BUT, WHAT IS WORSE, IT DOTH ALSO MISERABLY WEAKEN AND WASTE GRACE.** It is impossible that both grace and corruption should at once be strong and vigorous in the same soul. If the one thrive, the other must needs languish...if thy soul be overspread with unmortified sins, like so many rank⁵ and hurtful weeds sprouting up in it, grace must needs decay and wither; for [your soul] cannot have its sap to nourish it.

There are two things that do, as it were, nourish grace unto a mighty increase both of strength and beauty: and they are *holy thoughts* and *holy duties*. A man ordinarily needs nothing more to strengthen him but food and exercise. Holy thoughts are, as it were, the food of grace...Holy duties are, as it were, its exercise, whereby grace is breathed and preserved in health. But an unmortified lust hinders grace from gathering strength from thoughts or duties. For,

i. An unmortified lust doth usually sequester⁶ a man's thoughts to itself. How doth such a lust summon all the thoughts to attend upon it! Some it sends out upon one errand, some upon another, and all must be busied about its object. Where covetousness, pride, or wantonness is the unmortified sin, how is the imagination crowded full of thoughts that are making provision for these lusts! Some fetch in their objects, and some beautify and adorn them, and some buzz and whisper the commendations of those objects to the soul. Nay, and lest any thought should be vacant, some it will employ in fancying fictions and chimeras,⁷ things that never were nor are like to be, if they have but any tendency to feed and nourish that corruption. I appeal to your own experience for the confirmation of this. And this indeed is a good mark, whereby we may find out what is our unmortified sin: see what it is that most of all defiles your fancy, that the stream and current of your thoughts most run out after. Do your thoughts, when they fly abroad, return home loaded with the world? Do they ordinarily present to you fantastic riches, possessions, gains, purchases, and still fill you with contrivances how to make them real? Then *covetousness* is your unmortified lust. Do they dwell and pore upon your own perfections? Can you erect an idol to yourselves in your own imaginations, and then fall down and worship it? Or do your thoughts, like flies, pitch⁸ only upon the sores and imperfections of others? Then

⁵ **rank** – excessively growing.

⁶ **sequester** – appropriate; take forcible possession of.

⁷ **chimeras** – grotesque products of the imagination.

⁸ **pitch** – settle.

your unmortified sin is *pride*. And the like trial may be made of the rest. Now, I say, when an unmortified lust hath thus seized all the thoughts and pressed them to the service of a corrupted imagination, grace then [lacks] its food: it is ready to be starved. No wonder if it languishes and decays!

ii. **An unmortified lust doth much hinder and interrupt the life, vigor, and spirituality of holy duties.** This it doth two ways: either by deadening the heart through the guilt of it or by distracting the heart through the power of it.

(1) *An unmortified lust deadens the heart in holy duties through the sense of the guilt of it lying upon the conscience.* Alas! How can we go to God with any freedom of spirit, how can we call Him Father with any boldness, while we are conscious of an unmortified lust that lies still at the bottom? Speak: do not your consciences fly in your faces and even stop your mouths, when you are praying with some such suggestions as these? “What! Can I pray for pardon of sin, for strength against sin, [though I] harbor and foster a known lust unmortified? Do I beg grace *against* sin and yet maintain a *known* sin?...Is not such a prayer mere hypocrisy and dissimulation?⁹ Will the Lord hear it? Or if He doth hear it, will He not count it an abomination to Him?” You, now, whose consciences thus accuse you, do you not find such reflections to be a great deadening unto duty?...Certainly, guilt is the greatest impediment to duty in the whole world. It...fills us with distrust, diffidence,¹⁰ and a slavish fear of coming before God, rather as our Judge than as our Father.

(2) *An unmortified lust hinders holy duty by distracting the heart through the power of it.* It draws away the heart from God: it entangles the affections, it scatters the thoughts, it discomposes the whole frame of the soul, so that at best, it proves but a broken and a shattered duty. And herein lies the cunning of Satan, that if there be any corruption in the soul more unmortified than another, that corruption he will be sure to stir up and interpose between God and the soul in the performance of duty. Now when lust thus hinders duty, grace hath not its breathing nor exercise. No wonder if it grows faint and decays!

3. SOME FOUL AND SCANDALOUS ACTUAL SIN LIES AT THE DOOR OF A NEGLECTED MORTIFICATION. [When] we see a professor at any time break out into the commission of some notorious wickedness, what

⁹ **dissimulation** – deception.

¹⁰ **diffidence** – lack of confidence.

can it be imputed unto, but that corruption took advantage of his neglect of mortification? When inward motions are suffered perpetually to solicit, tempt, and importune¹¹ the soul, it is a sign that lust hath already gained the affections. And could conscience be laid a-sleep, nothing would hinder it from breaking out into act...And therefore beware you do not license corruption¹² to stir and act within. You cannot set it bounds nor say to it, "Thus far thou shalt go, and no farther. Thou shalt go as far as *thoughts*, as far as *fancy*. But, Conscience, look thou to it that it proceed no farther." If you would therefore secure yourselves from this danger, mortify lust in the very womb! Stifle and suppress the motions and risings of it. Otherwise, ye know not to what a prodigious height of impiety it will grow. The least and most inconsiderable sinful thought tends to an infinite guilt:¹³ an unworthy and unbecoming thought concerning God tends to horrid blasphemy; every lascivious thought, to open uncleanness; every envious thought, to blood murder. Unless mortification be daily exercised to suppress and beat down these motions, you know not into how many soul-destroying sins they may hurry you.

4. ONE UNMORTIFIED LUST DOTH MIGHTILY ALIENATE THE HEART FROM ITS ACQUAINTANCE AND COMMUNION WITH GOD...There are but two things that keep up acquaintance between God and the soul: *on God's part*, the gracious communications of His Spirit, through which, by enlightening, enlivening, supporting, and comforting influences, He converseth with that soul to whom He vouchsafes¹⁴ them. *On our part*, the spiritual frame of the heart, whereby it doth with a holy delight, freedom, and frequency converse with God in the returns of sincere and cordial obedience. But an unmortified lust breaks off this acquaintance, as to both the parts of it.

i. It provokes God to suspend the influences of His Spirit and so to cut off the intercourse on His part: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth:" (Isa 57:17)...

¹¹ **importune** – persistently beg.

¹² **license corruption** – give permission to immorality and depravity.

¹³ "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...Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it 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, might it grow to its head...every rise of lust, might it have its course, would come to the height of villainy."—*John Owen*

¹⁴ **vouchsafes** – graciously gives.

ii. **One unmortified lust doth mightily untune the soul and disorder the spirituality of that frame and disposition in which it should be kept, if we would maintain communion with God.** Look how estrangement and distance grow between familiar friends. So likewise grows the estrangement between God and the soul. If a man be conscious of any injury that he hath done his friend, this will make him afraid and ashamed to converse with him, less free and less frequent in his society. So it is here in this case: an unmortified lust fills the soul with a guilty shame, arising from the consciousness of an injury done to God...

Now reflect upon yourselves, you who have indulged any sin: hath it not by degrees eaten out the spirituality of your hearts, and weakened the life and vigor of your communion? Hath it not made you dead, cold, and indifferent unto the things and ways of God? Have you not beheld God as it were at a great distance and cared not for a nearer converse with Him? Is it not high time, think you, that this lust, which hath thus divided between God and your souls, should now at length be mortified; and, this make-bait¹⁵ being once removed, that you again should renew the nearness of your acquaintance with Him? Otherwise, let me tell you, it is sadly to be feared, lest this estrangement grow into a woeful apostasy and end in a fearful perdition.

From "The Great Duty of Mortification," in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, Vol. 3, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690): Anglican minister; Chaplain at Magdalen College, Oxford, later became Bishop of Derry, Ireland; his writings are readable, clear, experimental; born in Sandford, Crediton, Devonshire.



Think what it cost the Lord Jesus to expiate the guilt of sin by suffering the wrath of the great and terrible God for it in our room! The meditations of a crucified Christ are very crucifying meditations unto sin. He suffered unspeakable things for sin: It was a divine wrath that lay upon His soul for it...It was unmixed and unallayed wrath, poured out in the fullness of it, even to the last drop. And shall we be so easily drawn to the commission of those sins which put Christ under such sufferings?—*John Flavel*

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.—*John Owen*

¹⁵ **make-bait** or **makebate** – someone or something that creates tension or strife.

GOSPEL OR LEGAL MORTIFICATION?

Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)

THERE is a woeful tenderness that we have of ourselves that keeps us from mortifying our corruption. Have you never discovered or seen the evil and bitterness of sin, but lived always in peace? Why, then it seems the strong man keeps the house:¹ if the passing of the gravel stone² never pained you, ye are not yet quit of it. If your heart was never pained with sin, it says your heart was never yet circumcised. The strength of sin remains where there has been no gospel-mortification...Yea, what great reformations have taken place among some, so as by their life you would think they were real converts because of their exactness and tenderness. Yet they are enemies of grace and strangers to the gospel, and consequently to true mortification, which cannot be by the Law, it being the strength of sin.

QUESTION: How shall I know, whether it be by the gospel that I mortify sin or by the Law?

ANSWER: 1. **Gospel and legal mortification differ in their principles from which they proceed.** Gospel-mortification is from gospel principles, viz., (1) the Spirit of God, “If ye through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13); (2) faith in Christ, “Purifying their hearts by faith” (Act 15:9); and (3) the love of Christ constraining, “The love of Christ constraineth³ us” (2Co 5:14). But legal mortification is from legal principles, such as, from the applause and praise of men, as in the Pharisees; from pride of self-righteousness, as in Paul before his conversion; from the fear of hell; from a natural conscience; from the example of others; from some common [promptings] of the Spirit; and many times from the power of sin itself, while one sin is set up to wrestle with another, as when sensuality and self-righteousness wrestle with one another. The man perhaps will not drink and swear: Why? Because he is setting up and establishing a righteousness of his own, whereby to obtain the favor of God. Here is but one sin wrestling with another.

2. **Gospel and legal mortification differ in their weapons with which they fight against sin.** The gospel-believer fights with grace’s

¹ **strong man...house** – the devil still controls you (Mat 12:29).

² **passing...stone** – the small hard mass that blocks the urinary tract causing severe pain.

³ **constraineth** – urges.

weapons, namely, the blood of Christ, the Word of God, the promises of the covenant, and the virtue of Christ's death and cross. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom [or, as it may be read, *whereby*, viz., by the cross of Christ], the world is crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). But now, the man under the Law fights against sin by the promises and threatenings of the Law: by its promises, saying, "I will obtain life and win to heaven, I hope, if I do so and so"; by its threatenings, saying, "I will go to hell and be damned, if I do not so and so." Sometimes he fights with the weapons of his own vows and resolutions that are his strong tower to which he runs and thinks himself safe.

3. They differ in the object of their mortification. They both, indeed, seek to mortify sin: but the legalist's quarrel is more especially with the sins of his conversation;⁴ the true believer should desire to fight as the Syrians got orders, that is, neither against great nor small, so much as against the king himself, even against original corruption (2Ch 18:30). A body of sin and death troubles him more than any other sin in the world: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). His great exercise is to have the seed of the woman to bruise the head of the serpent.

4. They differ in the reasons of the contest. The believer, whom grace teaches to deny all ungodliness, fights against sin because it dishonors God, opposes Christ, grieves the Spirit, and separates between his Lord and him. But the legalist fights against sin because it breaks his peace, troubles his conscience, and hurts him by bringing wrath and judgment on him, as children that will not play in the dust or stour.⁵ Why? Not because it sullies⁶ their clothes, but flees into their eyes and hurts them. So, the legalist will not meddle with sin. Why? Not because it sullies the perfections of God and defiles their souls, but only because it hurts them. I deny not, but there is too much [of] this legal temper even amongst the godly.

5. They differ in their motives and ends. The believer will not serve sin because he is alive to God and dead to sin (Rom 6:6). The legalist forsakes sin, not because he is alive, but that he may live. The believer mortifies sin because God loves him; but the legalist, that God may love him. The believer mortifies sin because God is pacified towards him; the legalist mortifies that he may pacify God by his mortifica-

⁴ **conversation** – conduct; lifestyle.

⁵ **stour** – lying dust raised by the rapid movement of a person or thing.

⁶ **sullies** – soils; mars the cleanness of.

tion. He may go a great length, but it is still that he may have whereof to glory, making his own doing all the foundation of his hope and comfort.

6. They differ in the nature of their mortification: The legalist does not oppose sin violently, seeking the utter destruction of it; if he can get sin put down, he does not seek it to be thrust out. But the believer, having a nature and principle contrary to sin, seeks not only to have it weakened, but extirpated;⁷ the quarrel is irreconcilable; no terms of accommodation or agreement; no league with sin is allowed, as it is with hypocrites.

7. They differ in the extent of the warfare: not only *objectively*, the believer hating every false way; but also *subjectively*, all the faculties of the believer's soul, the whole regenerate part being against sin. It is not so with the hypocrite or legalist: as he spares some sin or other, so his opposition to sin is only seated in his conscience. His light and conscience oppose such a thing, while his heart approves of it. There is an extent also as to time: the legalist's opposition to sin is of a short duration; but in the believer it is to the end, grace and corruption still opposing one another.

8. They differ in the success: There is no believer, but as he fights against sin, so first or last he prevails, though not always to his discerning. And though he lose many battles, yet he gains the war. But the legalist, for all the work he makes, yet he never truly comes speed:⁸ though he cut off some actual sin, yet the corrupt nature is never changed. He never gets a new heart. The iron-sinew in his neck, which opposes God, is never broken; and when he gets one sin mortified, sometimes another and more dangerous sin lifts up the head. Hence, all the sins and pollutions that ever the Pharisees forsook and all the good duties that ever they performed made them but more proud and strengthened their unbelieving prejudices against Christ, which was the greater and more dangerous sin. Thus, you may see the difference between legal and gospel mortification and try yourselves thereby.

From "The Strength of Sin," Sermons CXXX-CXXXI in *The Works of Ralph Erskine*, Vol. 5, reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications.

Ralph Erskine (1685-1752): Presbyterian minister; popular preacher in the Church of Scotland in his day; born in Monilaws, Northumberland, Scotland.

⁷ **extirpated** – completely destroyed; plucked up by the roots.

⁸ **he...comes speed** – he is never truly successful.

HOW MAY I KNOW IF I AM IN A STATE OF MORTIFICATION?

Christopher Love (1618-1651)

HOW may I know whether the Lord has brought me into a state of mortification or not?...It may be that some of you are very desirous to be satisfied in it, so I shall give you six revealing characteristics of it and go over them very briefly. Would you know whether God has brought you into a state of mortification or not?

1. You may know it by this characteristic: if you are now more fearful of running into occasions and opportunities of sin than you have been in times past, this is an argument that you are a mortified man. An unmortified heart is bold and venturous and will rush upon occasions of sin, whereas a mortified heart is very careful to avoid all occasions of evil.

One compares a mortified man to a dove or partridge. Now such as use that game of hawking report that such an innate fear and dread doves or partridges have of the hawk that they not only fear the hawk but the very feathers of it. So a mortified man not only fears a downright sin, but also anything that may be a provocation or inlet to a sin. Now if this holy fear of displeasing and offending God is found in you, I may safely pass this sure judgment upon you: you are a mortified man when you are in such a gracious frame and temper of spirit as that in Jude 23, when you hate the garment spotted with the flesh...

2. Another discovery is this: when an occasion of committing a sin is openly offered to a man, along with concurring circumstances that might provoke him to that sin, yet he will restrain and bridle his appetite and will not commit that sin. This is a sign of a truly mortified heart, and if God has brought you into such a frame, He has thoroughly mortified your corruptions.

Beloved, an unmortified man may abstain from a sin when there is no opportunity or occasion offered to commit that sin. But this is an argument of a mortified heart: though all occasions for acting a sin concur, yet he will abstain from it...Joseph in Genesis 39:9...had a fair occasion offered him to commit the sin of adultery. He had op-

portunity, for he and his mistress¹ were alone. He had importunity, for she urged and solicited him from day to day to do it. He had secrecy, too, for the text says that the doors were shut. There was none but the two of them in the house. He might have gotten a great deal of preferment and advantage by it, for she would have made him lord over her house. You see that here was opportunity, importunity, secrecy, and advantage. All these occasions were clearly offered and concurred to invite Joseph to the sin of uncleanness. Yet, for all this, Joseph replied, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). Here you see the power of sin mortified in Joseph’s heart. Now, do you try your own hearts by this pattern, that when all occasions are offered for committing a sin, you can still say “no” to your lusts?...

3. If there is any tendency in your heart toward a greater resistance against the devil’s temptations to sin than formerly, this is a good argument that the Lord has brought you into a state of mortification. It may be that heretofore your nature was like gunpowder, apt to be in a flame upon any temptation. But now it is like green wood that will lie a great while upon the fire before it burns. So a temptation can hardly persuade you to yield to it. If it is thus with you, you have made great progress in this work of mortification.

4. If there is a fair proportion between the death of sin and the life of grace in your soul, then you are a mortified man. Beloved, the Lord’s work is not a half-work, to kill corruptions in your heart and no more; but if the Lord has savingly subdued sin in your soul, He will work a contrary work of grace in you that shall live and act in your soul. Mortification and the death of sin must come in tandem with vivification² and the life of grace. So if sin is dead, grace shall live in your soul. Therefore, the apostle joins them both together in Romans 6:11: “Reckon yourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God.” 1 Peter 4:1-2: “For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God.” Here the apostle not only enjoins us not to spend our time in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, but to live unto God. Therefore, beloved, that is only a cessation, not a mortification of corruption, where there is a forcible restraint laid upon your lusts. They only seem to be dead, but are not so really.

¹ **mistress** – in this sense, the lady of the house, not his partner in immorality.

² **vivification** – having spiritual life bestowed upon one.

5. **Mortification is discovered by this characteristic: where the keeping under of any corruption is the result of a deep humiliation.** The mortification that never had true humiliation preceding is but a mere cessation from sin. Your sins have never yet been truly mortified if your heart has not been truly humbled. Many men do with their sins as fencers do upon a stage: sometimes they give one another a slight blow or scare, but they never strike a deadly stroke. Some men will play with sin, but never give it a mortal wound. A truly mortified man is like a warrior: he will either kill or be killed. He will kill his sins or else his sin will kill him. Now examine yourselves in this: are you only fencers, to sport and play with your lusts, or are you warriors who fight with an implacable opposition against sin? Do you only give a slight scare to sin or have you given it a deadly wound?

6. **Mortification may be discovered by its breadth, for it does not consist in the killing of any one particular sin, but in striking at the root and whole body of sin.** Therefore, the apostle exhorts us to mortify our members which are on the earth—fornication, uncleanness, etc.—and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; to keep under the whole body of sin. It is with the mortification of sin as it is with the dying of the body. You know that death is not a seizure upon the arm or leg, or any one or two members, but upon all the members of the body—all must die. So mortification is not the killing of any one member of sin, but a seizure upon the whole body of sin. The keeping under of some particular sins does not argue mortification unless you have given a mortal wound to the very body and bulk of corruption...

Take this for your comfort: in the mortification of every sin, you have Christ's strength to help you as well as your own...He rewards us as if we had done it ourselves.

From *The Mortified Christian* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria. Used by permission.

Christopher Love (1618-1651): Presbyterian preacher and author; popular preacher and member of the Westminster Assembly; born in Cardiff, Glamorganshire, Wales.



And this is the first thing that the Spirit doth 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 pretences, makes the soul own its abomination, and lie down under the sense of it...The Spirit alone establishes the heart in expectation of relief from Christ.—*John Owen*