

John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 4: How Life and Comfort Depend on Mortification
from Various Scriptures

adapted from Owen's *Mortification of Sin* ch. IV

Introduction: The word "mortify" means "to put to death" and is used in the KJV of Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5, both of which speak of dealing with sinful habits arising from our fleshly natures.

As we walk with our God we desire greatly His strength, comfort, power, and peace. The realization of these, and thus the joy of our spiritual life, depends greatly upon the mortification of sin.

Enjoy God's blessings through mortification.

I. Two important understanding of this relationship:

- A. Life and comfort do not proceed from mortification, as if they were necessarily tied to it.
 - 1. A man may carry on a constant course of mortification all his days and never enjoy a single day of peace and consolation.
 - a. Heman in Psalm 88 is a good example of this.
 - b. Heman was a friend of God who was singled out by God as an example to those who would later be in distress.
 - 2. God makes his peace by divine work (Isa. 57:18-19). We may use means in attaining it, but the ultimate gift of it is God's own prerogative.
- B. Mortification is not the immediate means that God has instituted to give us life, vigor, courage, and consolation.
 - 1. The immediate cause of all our privileges and blessings is our adoption as children of God.
 - 2. Our spiritual life, vigor, courage, and consolation come at the hand of the Spirit as we sense and understand our adoption and justification.
- C. In our ordinary walking with God, and in the ordinary course of His dealings with us, the vigor and comfort of our spiritual lives depend much on our mortification.
 - 1. Mortification not only has a cause-and-effect relationship on our joy but also works to bring it about.
 - 2. The vigor of the Christian's spiritual life is impossible apart from mortification.

II. Mortification prevents sin from depriving us of spiritual health and life. Two things every unmortified sin does:

- A. Unmortified sin weakens the soul and deprives it of vigor (Ps. 38:3, 8; 40:12).
 - 1. Sin puts the heart itself out of tune and outside its proper boundaries by entangling its affections and diverting it from communion with God.
 - a. It takes control of the affections and makes us love the object of our desire more than God (1 John 2:15; 3:17).
 - b. The unmortified soul cannot say that God is its portion because it loves something else. The soul should be full of God when it is really entangled in worldly pursuits.
 - 2. Sin fills the thoughts with its enticements. It captures the thoughts and seeks to make provision for and fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Rom. 13:14).

3. Sin breaks out and actually hinders duty. It does this by playing upon your natural desires and leading you to other things when you should be worshipping and serving God.
- B. Unmortified sin darkens the soul and deprives it of comfort and peace.
1. It hinders one from feeling God's love and favor, takes away the sense of our adoption, and scatters thoughts of comfort, hope, and assurance.
 2. Mortification prunes the graces of God, making room for them in our hearts so they can grow.
 3. If the graces of God are planted in a heart where there is no concern for mortification, they begin to die (Rev. 3:2) by being choked out by the weeds of sin. Attending to the daily duty of mortification clears out the weeds of sin so the graces can thrive and flourish.