

**John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 10: Seeing Sin for What It Is**
from Various Scriptures

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

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.

This chapter continues the list of nine preparatory directions for mortification before the final chapter which gives two specific directions for mortification itself.

Preparatory Direction 2: Get a clear and abiding sense upon your mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of the sin with which you are troubled.

In order to see sin for what it is, consider the following:

I. Consider the guilt of sin.

A. **Sin always seeks to play down its guilt** by telling us, "Isn't this a little sin?" (cf. 2 Kings 5:18) or "This isn't as bad as this other sin" or "This isn't as bad as what so-and-so does." Sin darkens the mind so that we do not and cannot make the proper judgments about things.

B. Consider two things when determining the guilt of a sin:

1. For a believer, the power of sin is weakened in him by God's grace so that he is not under the authority of sin as others are, but the guilt which arises from unmortified sin is aggravated and heightened because he has received grace (Rom. 6:1-2). Sinning against grace is more serious than if you did not have any grace at all.
2. God delights in the abundance of beauty and excellencies in the heart of his children more than in the most glorious works of other men. As God sees greater joy in the believer's graces, he also sees a greater evil in the working of their lust and outward sins than in the open, notorious acts of wicked men. This is why Jesus says in Rev. 3:15, "I know your works"; their works did not measure up to their profession.

II. Consider the dangers of abiding sin.

A. Danger 1: Being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

1. Hebrews 3:12-13
2. The hardening of sin is serious because your heart then becomes insensitive to moral influence.
3. Every sin and lust, no matter how little, makes more progress toward this.
4. Owen says that while "at one time you may have been tender and would melt under the influence of the Word and under trials will grow 'sermon-proof' and 'trial-proof.'"
5. The things that once moved you will no longer move you and you will be able to do your spiritual duties: reading the Word, hearing sermons, prayer, without your heart being affected by them.
6. Sin will be a light thing and you will not be much troubled about it.

B. Danger 2: Coming under a great chastisement

1. Psalm 89:30-32

2. God will not cast away his child, but he may very well visit them with the rod. He will forgive and comfort you, but he will “work vengeance upon your sinful designs.
3. Is it nothing to you that this chastisement may involve others also, who will be hurt, damaged, even ruined by your sin?
4. God does not always deal so harshly with his children, but when he does deal with you in such a way, and your conscience bears witness that you have provoked it, his dealings will be full of bitterness to your soul.
5. If you do not fear these things, your heart has been hardened.

C. Danger 3: The loss of peace and strength all a man’s days

1. The goal of the promises of the Covenant of Grace is that a person have peace with God and walk before him. Unmortified sin will rob one of those blessings.
2. David complained of as much in Psalms 32 and 51.
3. Some will not realize this and continue sinning (Isa. 57:17; Hos. 5:15).
4. Remember the peace you have had and the everlasting destruction from which you have been saved and seek his peace.

D. Danger 4: The danger of eternal destruction

1. There is a connection between continuing in sin and eternal destruction.
 - a. God does graciously deliver some from sin but deliverance is not for those who continue in sin.
 - b. For any that continue under the power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God should be held out (Heb. 3:12; 10:38).
 - c. Remember Galatians 6:8.
2. Some entangled in this manner is under the power of sin and corruption and has no clear evidence of having participated in the grace of God.
 - a. Such a person cannot claim any assurance of being saved from destruction nor claim promises such as Romans 8:1 since this promise is to those described in 8:4.
 - b. While some say that this will lead people away from faith, such a realization should lead people to seek freedom from such entanglement.

III. Consider the present evils of sin.

A. It grieves the holy and blessed Spirit.

1. Eph. 4:30
2. The heart is the Spirit’s dwelling place and he is grieved when we give his enemies safe haven there.
3. In light of Lam. 3:33, “For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men” we should seek not to grieve him.
4. Consider the blessings he has given and that the sin you commit and cling to is all done under the eye of the Holy Spirit who dwells in and with you.

B. The Lord Jesus Christ is wounded afresh by it (Heb. 6:6).

C. It will take away a man’s usefulness in his generation.

1. He has no reason to believe his endeavors will be blessed by God.

2. The world [and the church] is full of people who profess faith and yet do not in reality possess it. Such people are useless.
3. Many true believers are barren and useless because they harbor sin in their heart which “lies as a worm at the root of obedience and corrodes and weakens it day by day. All graces, ways, and means whereby one may be improved are hindered by sin. God blasts such men’s efforts.”

Conclusion: “We must keep in mind the danger of such lust. We must keep alive in our hearts the guilt, danger, and evil of it. We should be much in the meditation of these things, and cause the heart and mind to dwell on them. We should engage our thoughts in these considerations. We should not let them go from us until they have a powerful influence upon our souls, and make us tremble.”