

**John Owen on Dealing with Sin:  
Lesson 11: A Tender Conscience and a Watchful Heart (Part 1)**  
from Various Scriptures

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

*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 3: Charge your conscience with the guilt of indwelling sin.***

*Acknowledge the guilt of sin when it rises up in you.*

**I. Consider indwelling sin in relation to the law.**

- A. Allow the law to speak to your conscience and cultivate the necessary and proper guilt.**
- B. Allow also the terror of the Lord as displayed in the law to affect you greatly.**
- C. Consider how righteous it is that every one of your sins receives their just punishment.**
- D. You might be tempted to dismiss this guilt by thinking you are free from its condemnation.**
  1. Tell your conscience that you are not assured that you are free from the condemning power of sin as long as unmortified lust dwells in your heart. How can you consider yourself delivered from the very sin you entertain?
    - a. Maybe you are lost and sin really does have dominion over you.
    - b. If you plead in the deepest part of your heart that you are freed from the condemning power of sin yet allow the least sin to be entertained, then you cannot on gospel authority claim spiritual security.
  2. The law was commissioned by God to judge sin wherever it finds it and bring it before his throne.
    - You stand before God and his law has found you out and condemns your sin. If you can plead pardon, that will be good, but if not, the law will do its work and you will be condemned.
  3. The purpose of law is to discover sin and the guilt of it.
    - a. The law should awaken and humble the soul by revealing sin in all its terribleness and depth. If you are unwilling to deal with this, your soul has been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
    - b. Many have fallen into this trap of claiming deliverance from the law so they can ignore its guidance and direction; they do not want to measure their sin by the law anymore.

*Summary:* You must pay attention to the law as it speaks concerning your lust and corruption. If your ears are open, the law will speak in a voice that will make you tremble. If you ever hope to gain the victory in mortification, you must tie your conscience to the law. Do not allow it to dodge the law's arrows. Allow the law to give you a clear view of your guilt. As David said, “My sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:3).

## **II. Consider your sin in relation to the gospel.**

**Bring your sin to the Gospel, not for relief, but for further conviction of your guilt.**

- A. When you see Jesus, “whom you have pierced” (Zech 12:10) you will say, “What have I done?”
- B. You will ask yourself if this is how respond to the grace and love of God.
- C. Allow your conscience to consider these things every day. See if your conscience can resist the way these considerations aggravate your guilt. If you can resist them, your case is very dangerous.

## **III. Three particular instructions:**

Consider the benefits you have under the gospel and cherish your redemption. This will aggravate the guilt of the corruption in your heart.

### **A. Consider the infinite patience and forbearance of God toward us.**

- 1. God could have brought you to shame and made you an object of wrath forever.
- 2. Despite this, you have innumerable times “dealt treacherously” with him, flattering him with your lips while your heart was far from him (Matt. 15:8; Mark 7:6).
- 3. Have you ever wondered how he could possibly bear with you much longer? Despite this, he has returned with visitations of love.

### **B. How many times have you been at the door of being hardened by sin and then the infinite and rich grace of God has recovered you to fellowship with him again?**

- 1. Have you ever experienced a slipping from delight in your spiritual duties, a lack of desire for the ordinances, prayer, meditation?
- 2. It is amazing that this might happen but it does. Will you allow yourself to drift any further away from the Lord toward hardness of heart?

### **C. It is important now to consider all God’s gracious dealing with you.**

- 1. Consider his providential blessings, deliverances, mercies, and enjoyments that he has given you. Fill your conscience with such memories.
- 2. Do not leave these meditations until your heart is strongly influenced with the guilt of indwelling corruption.

Conclusion: Continue in all these meditations until you feel the wound of your corruptions in your conscience and you seek to lie in the dust before the Lord. Until you can get your conscience in such a state, you will not be able to gain the victory. As long as your conscience is able to justify your failure, your soul will never vigorously attempt the mortification of sin.