

**John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 2: Why the Flesh Must be Mortified**
Colossians 3:15

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

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.

You must always be at this duty of mortification; you cannot take a day off from it. You must always be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Your new life in Christ does not excuse you from this. John 15:2 – the Lord prunes the vine as long as it has a branch. How can you expect to be exempt? 1 Cor. 9:27 – this is Paul's daily work; how can you expect to be any different?

Constantly work to mortify (put to death) the flesh because...

I. Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world.

- A. To think we can live perfectly dead to sin is to live in foolish pride (Gal. 5:17) even though we are renewed daily (2 Cor. 4:16).
- B. We must not think that we are already perfect (Phil. 3:12).
- C. Only death frees us from this struggle (Phil. 3:21).

II. Sin is still acting and laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh.

- A. We must war against it even when it seems dormant because it is always at work (Gal. 5:17)
- B. It is easy for it to overtake us (Heb. 12:1), especially when we are not watching for it.

III. Sin, if not continually mortified, will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, and soul-destroying sin.

- A. Every time sin rises, it seeks to manifest itself in the extreme (e.g., David). It is like the grave in that it is never satisfied.
- B. Sin is deceitful and tries to harden a person's heart to his or her ruin (Heb. 3:13).
 - a. Sin begins modestly but soon takes further ground until it is out of control.
 - b. As it proceeds, it gradually hardens one's heart which in turn drives one even deeper into sin.
- C. The best saints are in danger of this unless they are constantly mortifying the flesh.

IV. The Holy Spirit and our new nature are given to us to oppose sin and lust.

- A. Gal. 5:17; 2 Pet. 1:4.
- B. We must employ the Spirit and the new nature in this battle, which Owen describes as “a battle for our souls.”
- C. If we neglect to use what God has given us, why should God give us more or give us something else?

- D. His benefits are given to us to be used for his glory and for our benefit. If we do not seek to use them daily, we sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God who has given them to us for our benefit.

V. Neglect of this duty makes the inner man decay.

- A. Paul says that our inward man is renewed daily (2 Cor. 4:6) even though the outward man perishes.
- B. Those who neglect mortification allow the inner man to perish, also.
- C. Grace in the heart must be exercised or it will wither and decay (Rev. 3:2) and sin will harden our hearts (Heb. 3:13).
- D. While grace withers, lust and sin flourish.
- E. We have all seen examples of saints who were tender-hearted, humble, and zealous turn earthly, carnal, cold, and wrathful; this happened because they did not mortify the flesh.
- F. True mortification is often lost today between harshness, legalism, worldliness on the one hand and mere pretences of liberty and grace, true hypocrisy, on the other.

VI. Spiritual growth is our main duty.

- A. It is the believer's duty to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1) and to be growing in grace every day (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18) so that our inner nature may be renewed daily (2 Cor. 4:6).
- B. These things cannot be accomplished without the daily mortifying of sin.
- C. "We will not be making progress in holiness without walking over the bellies of our lusts. He who does not kill sin along the way is making no progress in his journey."

The main point thus far:

"Even though we claim the meritorious mortification of our sin through the work of the cross of Christ, and though the implantation of our new life in Christ is in opposition to and destructive of the expression of sin, sin remains, acts, and works in the best of believers while we are yet in this world. It must be our constant duty to mortify it.

Before proceeding, I cannot but note that though there is in this generation a growing number of professors, a great noise of religion, religious duties in every corner, and preaching in abundance, there is little evidence of the fruit of true mortification. Perhaps we might find that, judging by the principle of mortification, the number of true believers is not as multiplied as it appears to be from those who have made mere profession. Some speak and profess a spirituality that far exceeds the former days, but their lives give evidence of a miserable unmortified heart. If vain spending of time, idleness, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, selfishness (1 Cor. 1) are the mark of Christians, we have them among us in abundance. May the good Lord send us a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers, or we will be in a sad condition."

Conclusion: Two evils which accompany every un-mortified person (who is in reality a mere professor rather than a true believer), one evil in himself, the other with respect to others:

1. The basic characteristic is an ability to digest sin without conviction.

- a. Such a person is on the brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and is being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
 - b. Such a person can pretend all he wants, but unconcern or little concern over sin is a serious offence to the grace and mercy of God!
 - c. There is no greater evidence of a “false and rotten heart” than to live in such a way. To claim
 - i. ...the blood of Christ, which is given to cleanse us (1 John 1:7)
 - ii. ...the exaltation of Christ, which is to give us repentance (Acts 5:31)
 - iii. ...the doctrine of grace, which teaches us to deny all ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12)...
 ...and then to allow sin is a rebellion which will cast one into perdition.
 - d. Such people were under conviction, but had no true desire for spiritual duties to begin with and such “professors” ultimately apostatize.
2. Such people have a negative influence on others in two ways:
- a. Others become hardened in their own sin by convincing themselves that they are in as good a condition as the “unmortified professor.”
 - b. Others are deceived into thinking that if they can just be as good as the “unmortified professor” then all will be well with them.