

**John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 5: What Mortification is Not**
from Various Scriptures
adapted from Owen's *Mortification of Sin* ch. V

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.

In order for a believer who has been overtaken in a sin (which, like all sin, weakens his soul's communion with God, takes away his peace, defiles his conscience, and exposes him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin) to be able to mortify that sin, lust, or corruption, he must first consider and understand what mortification is not.

View mortification realistically by realizing what it is not.

I. To mortify a sin is not to utterly root it out and destroy it.

- A. This is what we aim for but we will not accomplish it in this life.
 - 1. We still should mortify sin with the aim of utterly destroying it.
 - 2. We must not be discouraged at our failure to do so but understand that the final redemption will accomplish it.
- B. There may be such times of wonderful success by the Spirit and the grace of Christ that it seems one may have constant triumph over sin, but realize that the utter killing of it will not occur in this life.
 - 1. Paul was a "choice saint and a pattern for believers in faith, love, and all the fruits of the Spirit" and "had no equal in the world" but he himself said, "Not that I have already attained this or am already perfect (Phil. 3:12).
 - 2. Paul had a lowly body as we have which must be changed by the power of Christ in the last day. "We are complete only in Christ, not in ourselves (Col. 2:10).

II. Mortification is not merely the changing of some outward aspects of a sin.

- A. One may change his life but God knows the heart. One may change to a safer path but the path of sin still leads to hell.
- B. One may exchange an obvious sin for a hidden one. One may have a different heart in that it is more cunning, but not more holy.

III. Mortification is not merely the improving of our natural constitution.

- A. Some people have better natural temperaments than others with regard to sinful habits.
 - 1. Some do not struggle with the unruly passions and affections that others have.
 - 2. Some have a high degree of discipline with regard to certain aspects of life and so may seem to others to be mortified people.
 - 3. "It may be, however, that their hearts are a standing sink of all abominations."
- B. Natural temperaments are not a test of true mortification.
 - 1. Some may not have trouble with anger or lust but still may not advance in mortification.

2. Those who have different temperaments must still consider the need for self-denial with other sins such as unbelief or envy.

IV. A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted.

- A. Simon Magus left his sorceries but then turned to covetousness and ambition.
 1. He suffered under the same lust; it was merely diverted into another direction.
 2. A man may be aware of a lust and set out to war against it, while in the meantime that sin may vent itself in some other way.
 3. This is like an infection that is healed in one place but then breaks out in another place in the body.
- B. This diversion is common among those who have not experienced grace.
 1. There are changes in people's directions and interests that may put on in a different direction.
 2. As people grow older they often abandon the pursuit of youthful lusts even though they never mortified any of them.
 3. It is possible to leave one lust so that you may serve another.
 4. If you change pride for worldliness or sensuality for legalism, you damage both yourself and others.
 5. Just because you have left a sin does not mean you have mortified it; you have changed your master, but you are still a slave.

V. Occasional victories over sin are not mortification

There are two occasions or seasons in which a person who is fighting with a particular sin may seem to have mortified it, but has not in reality.

- A. When fear of scandal or judgment awakens the person to battle sin. Sin shrinks and appears dead but is really hiding until the battle is over. The sin is quiet for the time being but is waiting to do more damage once everything has passed. The Corinthians provide an example of this (2 Cor. 7:11).
- B. In times of trial, calamity, or affliction, when the heart is taken with the troubles, fears, and dangers to gain peace with God and freedom from the affliction. During this time sin is quiet and does not stir but it is not mortified. "Days spent in affliction and humiliation can be a great deception to believers." When the fear or the trial or affliction ceases to occupy the thoughts, the sin will return to its former life and vigor. Israel provides an example of this (Psalm 78:32-37).