

John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 8: God Demands Complete Obedience
from Various Scriptures
adapted from Owen's *Mortification of Sin* ch. VIII

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.

The first general rule is from the last chapter: *Unless a person is a true believer, that person can never mortify a single sin.* The subject of this chapter is the second general rule for gaining victory in mortification, which is this: *You cannot mortify a specific sin that is troubling you unless you are seeking to obey the Lord from the heart in all areas!*

The belief that one can ignore other commandments and exhortations of God while still attempting to deal with a certain sin is a common problem among people. Israel faced the same problem (Isa. 58:2, 5-7). This is like trying to cure a fever without treating the underlying infection that is causing the fever.

Obey the Lord, from your heart, in every area of life.

I. The belief that one may seek mortification apart from complete obedience is built on a bad foundation.

- A. You must hate all sin, not just the particular sin that troubles you.
- B. The solid foundation for the mortification of sin is love for Christ, because he went to the cross, and hate for the sin that sent him there.
- C. To seek mortification only because a sin troubles you is self-love.
- D. If you set yourself against a certain sin and neglect prayer or Bible-reading [or church attendance], you achieve no progress in grace because those neglects are also sinful and Christ died for them as well.
- E. Will God bless such hypocrisy? Will he free you from the sin that troubles you so that you can continue in the sins that do not trouble you but that grieve him?
- F. God's goal is to work complete obedience in you, not just victory over what troubles you.
- G. **2 Corinthians 7:1** “...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
- H. If you truly hate sin as sin, you must guard against everything that grieves the Holy Spirit, not just the things that trouble you.

II. Maybe God has allowed this troubling sin to have power over you to draw your attention to other failures and to your lukewarmness in walking before him.

- A. At the very least, troubling sin should lead you to consider your ways.
- B. It may be that this troubling by sin may lead to a thorough change in your walk with God.
- C. The troubling by a particular sin is a common and natural outcome of a careless spiritual course for two reasons:

1. Sin is natural in the human heart.
 - a. Sin is subtle, cunning, and crafty and it seduces, entices, fights and rebels.
 - b. As long as a Christian keeps watch over his heart, the sin withers and wastes away.
 - c. When a Christian is negligent, sin erupts, finds its expression in a particular avenue, and keeps pushing and disquieting the soul.
 - d. This person may wrestles with a sin all his days when a little spiritual diligence might have prevented this trouble.
2. God often allows a particular sin to chasten other negligence.
 - a. God often gives wicked people up to one sin as judgment for another (Rom. 1:26) from which they might have easily found deliverance.
 - b. God also might leave one of his children in one trouble to cure another.
 - i. This is what Paul experienced in 2 Cor. 12:7 when he was buffeted by Satan so that he would not be puffed up because of his abundance of spiritual revelations.
 - ii. Peter's denial of Christ was a correction to his foolish pride.
 - iii. If God would chasten these greatest of servants in such a manner, how can we expect anything different? And how can we expect to deal with sin if we fail to deal with the root cause?
 - c. You must seek not just the reform of one sin, but, by the power of God, the reform of your whole spiritual life.

Conclusion: If you seek to mortify any lust, you must be equally diligent in all parts of obedience. You must learn to see every sin and omission of duty as a burden to God. If you do not seek to obey God in every area, you will become spiritually weak. If you seek only victory over the one sin that troubles you, and do not consider the "sinfulness of sin," you are selfish and constantly antagonistic to God, who desires your complete obedience. As a result, there will be no positive outcome to the spiritual duties you undertake, and you will not gain the victory over the sin that troubles you.