

John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 12: Humility
from Various Scriptures
adapted from Owen's *Mortification of Sin* ch. XII

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 8: We need to discipline ourselves to think thoughts that fill us with the proper sense of self-abasement and awareness of our own sinfulness.

Develop a sense of humility before the Lord.

I. Meditate on the majesty of God and our infinite, inconceivable distance from him.

A. These meditations strike at the root of indwelling sin by filling us with a sense of our own sinfulness.

B. Consider the testimonies of people of God of old.

1. Job discovered God's greatness and majesty and it filled him with self-aborrence and humility (Job 42:5-6).
2. Habakkuk was made aware of the glory and majesty of God and had a physical reaction (Hab. 3:16).
3. "God is clothed with awesome majesty" (Job 37:22).
4. Men of the earth are compared to "grasshoppers," "vanity," and "dust on the scales" when compared to God (Isa. 40:12-25).

II. Consider how unacquainted you really are with God.

A. Consider how little you know of God and how little you can see into his eternal majesty.

- Even if you know enough to keep you humble, you really know very little of him and may speak as Agur did in Prov. 30:2-4.

B. Three particular instructions:

1. Labor to limit your pride by thinking of God's vastness and that you can only see a little portion of his majesty and glory.
2. Seek to keep your heart in continual awe of the majesty of God.
 - a. Realize that the most learned and eminent in this life still know very little of him and his glory.
 - b. To Moses was revealed the most glorious attributes that can be revealed (Exod. 34:5-6), but even these were only the "back parts" of God!
3. Consider the following:
 - a. We know more now through the Son than did our spiritual fathers through the Law.
 - b. The sight which Moses had of God was still inferior to the sight of God in Christ.

c. The Apostle Paul exalts the light of the Gospel above that of the Law.

C. Consider whom it is you seek to know.

1. We know so little of God because it is *God* we seek to know.
 - a. We often more of what he is *not* than what he is.
 - b. God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17), incomprehensible (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16), and unapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16).
 - c. Weigh these two particulars:
 - i. When we consider *the very being of God*, we find ourselves so far from the true knowledge of it that we cannot come up with right words and expressions.
 - ii. There are some truths of God that he has taught us to speak of and has even guided our expressions of them, but even when we have, *we do not really fully understand these things*. All we can do is believe and admire.
 - d. We are more perfect in our understanding when we realize that we cannot understand and rest there. It is just the “back parts” of eternity and infinity that we see.
2. We know so little because it is *by faith alone and not by actual sight* that we know God while on earth.
 - a. The primary acquaintance we have with God is by faith (Heb. 11:6; 2 Cor. 5:7) which is the argument and evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).
 - b. Our faith is built upon the testimony of the One whom we love though we have not seen (1 Pet. 1:8).

III. Objection: This is true for unbelievers, but not for those who have trusted Christ.

- A. We know enough to love him, to obey him, to delight in him, to believe him, and to serve him more than we do.
- B. The knowledge of God in Christ is exceedingly eminent and glorious and is far superior compared to any other knowledge that we might have attained and which was revealed under the Old Testament.
- C. The difference between believers and unbelievers is not in the *matter* of their knowledge, but in the *manner* of their knowledge.
- D. Jesus Christ by his Word and his Spirit reveals to his own that God is our heavenly Father and Rewarder.
- E. Notwithstanding, all we know is still a little portion of what we know of him.
 1. The purpose of God’s revelation in the Gospel is not to reveal him in all his fullness, but to reveal him as sufficient to be the foundation of our faith, love, obedience, and coming to him.
 2. We are dull and slow of heart to accept the things that have been revealed in his Word. God uses our weakness to teach continual dependence on him. Though we understand the truth of the gospel clearly, no one could ever come to a full knowledge of all that might be discovered in his Word.

Conclusion: Consider him with whom we are dealing: “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). And as we stand abashed in his presence, let us realize that our very nature is too limited to have an adequate sense of his essential glory.