

**John Owen on Dealing with Sin:
Lesson 13: Wait for the Verdict of God**
from Various Scriptures

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

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 concludes the list of nine preparatory directions for mortification before the final chapter which gives two specific directions for mortification itself.

Preparatory Direction 9: When God stirs your heart about the guilt of your sin, concerning either its root and indwelling, or its breaking out, be careful you do not speak peace to yourself before God speaks it. Listen closely to what he says to your soul.

Without carefully following this direction, you run the risk of having your heart exposed to the deceitfulness of sin. The warnings God gives us are to prevent our speaking to ourselves without warrant and blessing ourselves without the blessing of God.

Seek God's verdict on your forgiveness and mortification.

I. Two observations to keep in mind.

A. It is God's prerogative, in his sovereignty, to give grace to whom he pleases (Rom. 9:18).

1. Owen says: Among all the sons of men, he calls whom he wills, and sanctifies whom he wills. Among those so called and sanctified, he yet reserves the privilege to himself also, to speak peace to whom he pleases, and in what degree he pleases, even among those on whom he has bestowed grace.
2. Isaiah 57:16-19 – God says he will heal Israel's brokenness and misery and assumes this privilege to himself in a special way.
3. God works in a mystery and often his ways are contrary to expectations. So even in his communication of peace and joy to those in a state of grace, he often acts in a way that confounds our expectations.

B. Just as God creates peace for how he pleases, it is the prerogative of Christ to apply it to the conscience and he bears truthful testimony to our state and condition (Rev. 3:14).

1. Jesus is the "faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14).
2. We may flatter ourselves about our condition upon false grounds but he is the "faithful and true witness" and will speak truth about our state and condition.

II. Five rules by which you may know whether God speaks peace to you or whether you speak peace to yourself.

A. People speak peace to themselves when they do not view their sin, from the guilt of which they are seeking relief, with the greatest hatred imaginable. There should be an abhorrence of themselves for that sin.

1. If a person is wounded by sin, disturbed and perplexed, and realizes that there is no remedy except in the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, and if they look to God and his covenant promises and upon this basis quiet their hearts believing that wit will be

well with them and that God will be gracious to them – and yet they do not detest with utter hatred the sin in question – this is to heal themselves and not to be healed by God.

2. When a man looks upon Christ whom he has pierced (Zech 12:10), his mourning will be because it was his sin that pierced him!
3. When we look for peace his chastisements (Isa. 53:5) will come to mind and the Holy Spirit will cause hatred of sin or sins on account of which healing are sought (Ezek. 16:60-61).
4. When God comes and speaks peace to us, he fill our soul with shame for the ways we have been alienated from him (2 Cor. 7:11; Job 42:6).

B. People speak peace to themselves when they reason from the gracious promises of God and claim them in a purely rational and natural way. They are not truly repenting as they seek peace for their souls.

1. The Lord may be *near* but *in* this wind (1 Kings 19:11).
2. It is possible for a regenerate man to act out of merely natural and rational principles, not out of his true spiritual life. He is acting merely upon the principle of conviction and illumination in his moral nature. The Holy Spirit is not moving on these waters.
3. When a person falls into a sin he has struggled with previously, he reads Isa. 55:7 or Hosea 14:4, considers these promises, and on the basis of these promises he offers grants peace to himself whether the Spirit does or not or whether his application of the text is consistent with the author's intent.
4. At this point, one might ask this reasonable question: "How shall I know I am going it alone or when the Holy Spirit is leading?" Owen gives four answers:
 - (1) If you are in error about this, God will let you know it (Ps. 25:9). The peace you obtain this way will not last long. For a time your mind may be overpowered with its own convictions but after a little while such reasoning will grow cold and vanish at the first temptation.
 - (2) This course of action is often taken without waiting. Waiting is the grace and particular action of faith which God calls us to when we are in such condition. Sometimes the Lord does come upon someone suddenly, as in the case of David who was remorseful that he cut off a piece of Saul's garment (1 Sam. 24:4-7). Ordinarily, however, God calls us to wait and labor and attend to him in prayer (Isaiah 8:17). Those who speak peace to themselves are hasty; they will not wait, even for God to speak.
 - (3) Speaking peace to oneself may for a time quiet the conscience, the mind, and the reasoning of the soul, but it does not sweeten the heart with gracious contentment. When God speaks, however, there is not only truth in the words, there is healing. He returns our soul to rest (Ps. 116:7).
 - (4) Worst of all, speaking peace to oneself does not change the life; it neither heals the evil nor cures the disorder. When God speaks peace, he guides and keeps the soul so that it does not again return to folly. Speaking peace to yourself does not wean your soul from sin. When God speaks peace, there comes along with it such a sweetness and a discovery of his love that there is a strong desire and inclination to sin no more.

C. Speaking peace to yourself can be detected by the fact that we do it superficially (Jeremiah 6:14 – "They heal the wounds of my people lightly").

1. Some make the healing of their spiritual wounds insignificant work. They glance at the promise and that does it for them! Hebrews (4:2) says that “the word preached did not profit” some, because it was “not mixed with faith” in them.
2. Owen: “A mere look to the word of mercy in the promise is not enough, but it must be mingled with faith. Our faith allows us to enter into the heart of the promise, and then it does good to our souls.”
3. You must not seek peace outwardly, but must feed upon the promise and mix it with your faith so that it diffuses its virtue to your soul. To do less is to deal with your condition superficially and before long your wound will break out again and you will know you are not cured.

D. A person speaks peace to himself when he is concerned about one sin, while at the same time there is another evil of no less importance lying upon his spirit, about which he has no dealing with God. Such a person cries peace when there is none.

1. Consider a person feeling guilty about neglecting a duty they ought to have done and they seek forgiveness and find peace.
2. At the same time, this person has worldliness or pride or some other such sin which grieves the Holy Spirit and he is not disturbed by that sin. That person’s peace is not from God. It can only be well with someone when they have equal respect for all God’s commandments.
3. Hab. 1:13 – “You are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.”

E. When people speak peace to themselves, it is seldom the case that God at the same time speaks humiliation to their souls. But God’s peace is a humbling peace. David’s humiliation before Nathan and his subsequent pardon is an example (Ps. 51:1).

III. When you may take the comfort of a promise as your own.

- A. When God speaks the promise, whether sooner or later, we may claim it. Sometimes he will do it right away in such a manner that there is little doubt that God was in it. Sometimes he will make us wait longer. When he does speak, we may trust his pardon. In our communion with God, he is most troubled by our unbelieving fears. These keep us from receiving the strong comfort he is so willing to give us.
- B. There is a secret instinct in faith whereby it knows the voice of Christ when he truly speaks.
 1. Unbelief sometimes prevents this, but true faith leaps in the heart when Christ draws near just as the babe leapt in Elizabeth’s womb (Luke 1:41).
 2. John 10:27 – “My sheep know my voice.” In Solomon’s Song, the bride knows the voice of her husband (5:2). If you exercise yourselves to know and have fellowship with him, you will easily discern between his voice and the voice of a stranger. When God speaks, he speaks as no one has ever spoken. He speaks with power and will, one way or another, make your heart burn within you (Luke 24).
 3. Each one who has exercised himself to discern good and evil, and is increasing in judgment, experience, and observation to recognize Christ’s voice, and the operations of his Holy Spirit, is the best equipped to judge for himself when God is indeed speaking.
- C. As to when you may take the promise to yourself: If the Word of the Lord does good to your soul, He is the one who speaks it. If it humbles you and cleanses you, it is fulfilling the

purpose for which it was given to you, namely to endear, to cleanse to melt and bind to obedience, and to self-emptiness, and so on.

Conclusion: Without a proper consideration of this, sin will have a great advantage, and tend to the hardening of your heart.