The Mortification of Sin

John Owen

The Mortification of Sin

John Owen

http://www.servantofmessiah.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S PREFACE

CHAPTER 1

ROMANS 8:13 EXPLAINED
1. This duty to mortify sin is conditional, "But if you..."
2. The persons to whom this duty is prescribed.
3. What causes us to perform this duty is the Spirit
4. The duty that is prescribed is this: "Mortify the deeds of the body."
(1.) What is meant by *the body.*
(2.) What is meant by the *deeds of the body.*
(3.) What is meant by *mortify.*
5. The promise for fulfilling this duty is life: "You will live."

CHAPTER 2

THE DUTY OF THE BEST BELIEVERS
I. The first general principle: despite the death of sin on the cross, sin remains.
1. Indwelling sin stays with us while we are in this world; therefore we always need to mortify it.
2. Sin not only still abides in us, but it still acts, still labors to bring out the deeds of the flesh.
3. Sin not only troubles us, but if left alone, it produces soul-destroying sins.
4. The Spirit and the new nature are given to us so we have the moral strength to oppose sin.
5. Neglecting this duty renews the old man, and rots the new man.
6. It is our duty to be "perfecting holiness out of the fear of God."
Two evils accompany every unmortified professor of faith.
1. The evil in himself.
2. The evil in relation to others around them.

CHAPTER 3

FALSE MORTIFICATION OF SIN
II. The second general principle: Only the Spirit is sufficient to do this work of mortification;
1. Men seek other remedies in vain.
2. It is the work of the Spirit.
(1.) God promised to give the Spirit to us to do this work.
(2.) Mortification is a gift of Christ, and all the gifts of Christ come to us by the Spirit of Christ.
How does the Spirit mortify sin?
If this is the work of the Spirit alone, why are we urged to do it?

CHAPTER 4

USEFULNESS OF MORTIFICATION
III. The third general principle: the vitality of our spiritual life greatly depends on our mortification of sin.
1. Life, strength and comfort in our spiritual life are not the necessary result of mortification.
2. Life, strength and comfort in our spiritual life are privileges, not rights.
3. Life, strength, and comfort in our spiritual life greatly depend on mortification.
(1.) Mortification alone keeps sin from depriving us of them.
(2.) Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them to grow in our hearts.
(3.) Mortification, sincerely applied, produces peace.

CHAPTER 5

MORTIFICATION NEGATIVELY CONSIDERED
How do we fight indwelling sin in a way that maintains peace in our communion with God?
I. Mortifying a Sin -
1. Negatively
(1.) Mortifying a sin does not mean completely killing it.
(2.) Mortifying a sin does not mean disguising the sin.
(3.) Mortifying a sin is not changing our natural disposition to a quiet, sedate one.
(4.) Mortifying a sin is not diverting the sin to another outlet.
(5.) Mortifying a sin is not getting occasional victories over it.

CHAPTER 6

MORTIFICATION DESCRIBED IN ITS PARTICULARS

I. Mortifying a Sin -
2. Positively
(1.) Habitually weakening it.
(2.) Constant fighting and contending against it.
(3.) Realizing success over it.

CHAPTER 7

MORTIFICATION: THE WORK OF BELIEVERS
II: The ways and means we may use to mortify any particular sin
1. The 1st general rule: be sure to get an interest in Christ.
(1.) Unless a man is a believer, he cannot mortify a single sin.
(2.) Mortification is the work of faith, and the unique work of faith.

CHAPTER 8

UNIVERSAL SINCERITY NEEDED
2. The 2nd general rule: Strive to mortify ALL lusts, or fail to mortify ANY lust.
(1.) This kind of selective mortification is the result of a corrupt motive.
(2.) God may be using the persistent lust that troubles you to strengthen you.
Reasons for the predominance of a particular lust.
(1.) As its natural effect
(2.) As punishment for other sins

CHAPTER 9

SYMPTOMS OF A PARTICULAR LUST
III. Particular directions for dealing with a disturbing lust
The FIRST direction: Consider which dangerous *symptoms* accompany your lust.
1. The sin is long-standing and deep-rooted.
2. When the heart secretly pleas to approve and not oppose it.
3. There is frequent success in sin's seduction.
4. When a man fights against his sin only with legalistic arguments.
5. When it is probable that there is Godly rehabilitation involved through punishment.
6. When your lust has already withstood particular dealings from God against it.

CHAPTER 10

A SENSE OF THE GUILT OF SIN REQUIRED
The SECOND direction: Grasp the guilt, danger, and evil of your sin
1. Get a clear and lasting sense of the *guilt* of sin.
(1.) Continuing sin in believers is worse than sin in unbelievers.
(2.) Sin hidden in our heart is worse than sin evidenced by our acts.
2. Consider the multiple *dangers* of continuing to sin:
(1.) The danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
(2.) The danger of receiving serious correction in this life.
(3.) The danger of losing of peace and strength all your life.
(4.) The danger of eternal destruction.
3. Consider the *evils* of continuing to sin;
(1.) It grieves the holy and blessed Spirit.
(2.) The Lord Jesus Christ is wounded again by it.
(3.) It will take away a man's usefulness in his generation.

CHAPTER 11

FIVE MORE DIRECTIONS FOR DEALING WITH SIN
The THIRD direction: Load your conscience with the guilt of your sin.
1. Begin with generalities:
(1.) Consider the guilt that arises from the holiness of the law.
(2.) Consider Christ whom you have pierced.
2. Descend to *particulars.*
(1.) Consider the infinite patience and tolerance of God towards you personally.
(2.) Consider how often you have been restored by God's grace.
(3.) Consider all of God's gracious dealings with you.
The FOURTH direction: get a constant longing to be delivered from its power.
The FIFTH direction: Consider if the sin is rooted in your natural disposition.
1. This does not *minimize* the guilt of your sin in the least.

2. You must focus more because Satan has an advantage over you.
3. Force your body into submission.
The SIXTH direction: Guard against the occasions and opportunities of your sin.
The SEVENTH direction: React swiftly against the first signs of your sin.

CHAPTER 12

SELF-ABASEMENT BEFORE THE MAJESTY OF GOD
The EIGHTH direction: Consider the majesty of God and how little you know of Him.
1. Think about the greatness of God, and who you are by comparison.
2. Think about how *unfamiliar* you are with him.
(1.) We know so little of God, because it is God we are trying to know.
(2.) We know little of God, because it is by faith alone that we know him in this life.
(3.) No matter how much more we know through Jesus Christ, we still know very little.

CHAPTER 13

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST FALSE PEACE
The NINTH direction: Do not speak peace about a sin until God speaks it.
1. It is the great *prerogative and sovereignty* of God to give grace and peace to whom he pleases.
2. It is the prerogative of Christ to speak peace home to the conscience.
Rules to know whether God is speaking peace about a sin or it is false peace:
Rule 1: God is not speaking peace if there is no hatred of the sin or self-loathing
Rule 2: God is not speaking peace if it is based on convictions and rational conclusions.
Rule 3: We speak peace to ourselves when we do it *carelessly.*
Rule 4: God is not speaking peace if we are holding onto another sin.
Rule 5: God is not speaking peace if there is no humiliation in our souls.

CHAPTER 14

NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST
1. Set your faith on enlisting Christ to kill your sin.
(1.) By faith, fully consider the *provision* we have in Jesus Christ for this purpose.
(2.) Bolster your heart by faith to *expect relief* from Christ.
To further engage you in this expectation,
(1.) Consider Christ's *mercifulness,* tenderness, and kindness.
(2.) Consider the *faithfulness* of the One who has promised.
[1.] Such expectation enlists Christ's quick and complete assistance.
[2.] Such expectation makes the heart attentively listen for Christ.
First, let your faith act specifically *on* Christ crucified and slain.
Secondly, expect *power* and then endeavor to *conform* to Christ.
2. The work of the Spirit in mortification.
(1.) The Spirit alone convicts the heart of its sin.
(2.) The Spirit alone reveals to us *the fullness of Christ* for our relief.
(3.) The Spirit alone *bolsters* the heart to expect relief from Christ.
(4.) The Spirit alone brings the *cross* of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power.
(5.) The Spirit is the author and finisher of our *sanctification.*
(6.) The Spirit supports the soul's petitions to God.

http://servantofmessiah.org/

Editor's Preface

John Owen was one of the Westminster Divines, Dean of Christ Church of Oxford, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, and chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. The treatise was written in 1656, roughly 150 years after Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel. It was 100 years after the slaughter of the Hugenots in France, and just 45 years after the King James Bible was published. Some of the animosity between the Protestants and Catholics during that period is openly expressed in this paper and should be taken in its historic context. The restatement of this important work is not intended as a renewed attack. Nonetheless, any current practice of fighting sin that substitutes something in place of God's grace, and the power of His Spirit, may be judged by the Biblical standards John Owen outlines here.

This is a restatement and simplification of Owen's Mortification of Sin. Because the text has been modified, it should be used for teaching purposes only. If I have misrepresented the original text in any way, it is best to limit the permutation of such errors by sending readers back to that original. You may reproduce the text as long as you do not change it and you do not sell it to anyone. What has been done is this: the Old English terminology has been updated so that "thee" and "thou" are now "you" and "yours." The difficult structure has been simplified, and the internal structure has been modified to better lead the reader through Owen's train of thought. Sentences have been shortened and in many cases split into several sentences for clarity. Parallelism has been employed to maintain rhythm, and his unreferenced pronouns have been made explicit. The passive voice has been changed to active in most places. However, the full argument and supporting text are maintained. A few current colloquialisms have been substituted to crystallize the imagery. I apologize if they seem out of place. This is not a synopsis, but the entire treatise presented in the original work. As a result, the expository style remains.

The old King James passages of Scripture, and Owen's direct translations, have been restated in many cases for readability. Where this was done, the original Hebrew and Greek meanings were used to preserve his intent. The Scriptural references may be used to obtain a current translation in your favorite copyrighted version. For the most part, they have been moved to footnotes to aid the readability. Passages in Owen's original work that had no citations are now marked to help the reader find them more easily. Mis-marked passages have been corrected. Where Owen cites the original Greek, a bracket containing [NT:xxxx] has been inserted with the Anglicized Greek and Strong's numbers. Where you see "Cant." in the footnotes, it refers to the Song of Solomon (a canticle is a song).

Archaic words such as "temper" have been changed, in this instance to "state." The word "distemper" can have several meanings. Literally it means "against temperate or moderate behavior", but it can also mean "disease", or "disturbance". So it has been variously rendered "disease", "infection", "compulsion", "agitation", "disorder", "perverted", or "cancer of the soul" depending on the context. "Vigor" has been updated to "strength" in some instances, but left alone in others where he implies more than that, such as fullness of life, vitality, and potency. The word mortification, because it is the topic of the work, has been left alone. Owen defines it in the text of the work as he meant it to be used. It is simply the process of killing something, of putting it to death.

A table of contents has been created to make it easier to locate particular passages and to serve as a general outline of the argument. The published chapter breaks and synopses have been maintained, although Owen did not use them in his original manuscript. I hope the

restatement of this important work makes it more accessible to you, and helps you understand the importance of putting sin to death so that Christ might reign in your life in fullness of communion.

Owen explores in great depth what it means to kill sin in our lives. Killing sin is a path that we take toward personal holiness. It is how we maintain communion with God by honoring him with our obedience, exercised in cooperation with, and under the power of, the Holy Spirit. Holiness is not a list of do's and don'ts, like not swearing or not drinking alcohol. That would only be returning to the law that Christ freed us from. In his book Pursuit of Holiness, Jerry Bridges reminds us that holiness means "morally blameless" as God defines it in the Bible (Ps. 18:21-23). It means set apart for God's purposes. It does not mean sinless. If we never broke a law, we would be sinless. That is an impossible goal. The Bible tells us that, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, Pro. 20:9, 1Jn.1:8).

Holiness, on the other hand, is very possible. It happens when we renounce our lifestyle of sin, and devote ourselves to God. It is an attitude toward God more than perfect behavior. We are commanded to "be holy" so that we will be like our Father in heaven (Lev. 11:44, Lev. 19:2, Lev. 20:26, 1Cor. 1:2, Eph. 1:4, Heb. 12:14, 1 Pet. 1:14-16). That means our attitude toward sin needs to be centered on God, not on ourselves. As Jerry Bridges succinctly put it, it is not what we are against (sin), but what we are for (God) that counts. Joseph understood this idea when tempted by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:9). David said, "Against you only have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). We sin against God, not other people. Because sin separates us from God, we want to kill it to draw closer to Him. If that is our motive and our purpose, then we can succeed in killing it. Too often we attack sin because we worry about what others think of us, or how we feel about ourselves. That is not what holiness is about. That would be self-centered.

Holiness comes by faith, and yet faith takes effort. It means being faithful and trustworthy in our relationship with God. Killing sin is a duty that we are committed to, rather than a hobby or a sport that we play at. All sin, no matter how little, breaks faith with God and violates his law (Mt. 5:19). That is why we need to put all sin away, the little things as well as the big things. John Owen tells us sin is more a reflection of our heart than a behavior. It is the inward desire, not the outward action that embodies sin. The sins we commit are just symptoms of an underlying deadly disease. Sin kills, and so we need to kill it before it kills us. It destroys relationships; it shames us; and it ruins our full enjoyment of life. But with faith in Christ, and by the power of His Spirit, we can overcome sin so that it no longer rules us.

One note before we begin. There is a phrase you will see that indicates sin never leaves us, and it never stops trying to control us. It is called "residing sin." All our lives, we either let sin control us, or we let the Spirit of Christ control us. John Owen is speaking about what happens to us when we let sin control us, or when we let one particular desire rule us. He is not talking about its presence, but its power. God spoke to Cain about this constant struggle for power. "If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you don't, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you [meaning manipulate you], but you must master it." Gen. 4:7. Owen gives us the tools and the attitude we need to master sin in our life. He describes a mind controlled by the Spirit. Our sinful desires become so weak that they cannot produce the deeds of sin. Using his analogy of disease and symptoms, the disease is so controlled that the visible outbreaks of infection disappear. To help you maintain this distinction while reading,

- categorical "sin" or "lust" refers to this overall desire (the sinful nature or lust of the flesh)
- a singular "sin" or "lust" refers to our specific desire for something
- the word "deed" refers to acting on the desire (committing the sin), and

- the word “wound” refers to the effect of the deed on our conscience and on those around us.

I hope you use Owen’s treatise in this updated language to benefit your personal walk with God.

William H. Gross

CHAPTER 1

ROMANS 8:13 EXPLAINED

- The basis of Paul's argument in Rom. 8:13
- The words of the apostle opened
- The connection between true mortification and salvation
- Mortification is the work of believers
- The Holy Spirit is the main cause of mortification
- What is meant by "the body" in the words of the apostle
- What is meant by "the deeds of the body"
- Life, in the sense of full vigor and power, is a consequence of this duty of mortification.

To provide some direction in order to make the work of mortification in believers clearer, I will lay a foundation on the words of the apostle in Rom. 8:13, "If you mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit, you will live." I will build on this verse to reveal the great evangelical truth and mystery it contains. In verses 1-3 of Romans chapter 8, the apostle restates his doctrine of justification by faith, and the blessed condition of those who share in it by grace. He proceeds to expand on it to explain the holiness necessary to believers, and the comfort that is available to them.

Among his arguments and motivations to holiness, the verses mentioned contrast what happens when we choose to sin: "If you live after the flesh, you will die." What it means to "live after the flesh," or what it means to "die," is not my present focus. Even so, I will explain them in the context of Rom. 8:13. This will lay a foundation for the ensuing discourse.

First, it makes our duty, the means to perform it, and the resulting promise, conditional: "If you,"

Second, it identifies the persons to whom it is prescribed: "If you mortify. "

Third, it identifies the Spirit as the cause or means of performing this duty: " through the Spirit."

Fourth, there is a duty prescribed in this verse: "Mortify the deeds of the body. "

Fifth, there is a promise annexed to performing that duty: "You will live. "

1. This duty to mortify sin is conditional, "But if you..."

Conditional phrases may specify two things –

(1.) That it is uncertain that the person to whom the duty is prescribed will realize the event or receive the thing promised. This is true where the condition is absolutely necessary to the event or thing occurring, and the condition itself does not depend on anything else known to that person. So we say, "If we live, we will do such a thing." But this uncertainty cannot be the intent of using the conditional phrase in this verse. I say that because verse 1 of the same chapter says, "There is no condemnation for them;" there is no uncertainty in that.

(2.) The condition can also specify the certainty of the connection between the things spoken of. For example, we can say to a sick man, "If you take this medicine, then you will be well." We are expressing the certainty of the connection between the medicine and the health of the patient. This is how it is used here. The certain connection between mortifying the deeds of the body and living is what is intimated in this conditional phrase.

There are various ways to connect things conditionally. They can either be cause and effect to

each other, or the means and the end achieved. This connection between mortification and life is not cause and effect, for "eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ."[1] It is means and the end achieved by it. God has appointed this means for attaining that end, which he has freely promised. Means, though necessary, are subservient to the end of the free promise of life. Providing a gift, and requiring the recipient to procure it, are inconsistent with each other. The intent of this condition, then, is to make a certain and infallible connection between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you will obtain that end; if you mortify, you will live. In this prescription for life, we find the primary motive to perform the duty.

2. The persons to whom this duty is prescribed.

The audience is expressed in the word "you." In the original it is included in the verb, [NT:2289 thanatoo] "if you mortify;" that is, you believers; you for whom "there is no condemnation," Rom. 8:1; you who are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit," verse 9; who are "given life by the Spirit of Christ," verses 10, 11. This duty is prescribed to you. Imposing this duty on anyone other than a Christian is characteristic of the self-righteousness that the world is full of, the great labor of devout men who are ignorant of the gospel.[2] This description of the persons to whom the duty is prescribed, is the main foundation of this thesis.

The best believers, who are certainly freed from the condemning Power of sin, still need to make it their business to mortify the indwelling power of sin all their life.

3. What causes us to perform this duty is the Spirit

"If… by the Spirit" [NT:4154 pneuma] - The Spirit here is mentioned in Rom. 8:11. He is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, that "dwells in us," verse 9, that "gives us life," verse 11; "the Holy Ghost," verse 14; the "Spirit of adoption," verse 15; the Spirit "that makes intercession for us," verse 26. All other ways of mortifying sin are useless; all other helps leave us helpless. It must be done by the Spirit. As the apostle implies in Rom. 9:30-32, men may attempt to do this based on other principles, or by other means, just as they have always done and still do. But, he says, "This is the work of the Spirit. It is done by him alone, and it cannot be accomplished by any other power." Mortification using our own strength, or carried on by ways that we invent, to make ourselves righteous in our own eyes, is the core of every false religion in the world. And this is the second principle of my ensuing discourse.

4. The duty that is prescribed is this: "Mortify the deeds of the body."

Three things need to be examined:

(1.) What is meant by the body;
(2.) What is meant by the deeds of the body;
(3.) What is meant by mortifying them.

(1.) What is meant by the body.

The body in the close of the verse is the same as the flesh in the beginning: "If you live after the flesh you will die; but if you ... mortify the deeds of the body, etc." That is, the body is the same thing the apostle has been referring to as the flesh. This is evident from the contrast between the Spirit and the flesh, or the before and after. The body, then, represents the corruption and depravity of our nature. In great part, the body is the container, and the means

of expressing our sinful nature. Our sinful nature makes the members of the body servants to unrighteousness.[3] What is meant by the body is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust. Many reasons might be given for using this figure of speech, but I will not go into them. The "body" here is the same as we find in Rom. 6:6, referring to the "old man" [NT:3820,444 palaiosanthropos], and "body of sin" [NT:4983,266 somahamartia] More comprehensively, it may express the whole person as corrupted, and the person himself as the seat of lusts and perverted affections.

(2.) What is meant by the deeds of the body.

The word is "praxis" [NT:4234], which, indeed, indicates mostly the outward actions, "the works of the flesh" as they are called in Gal. 5:19, [NT:2041 ergon]. There they are said to be "manifest" or obvious; and they are enumerated. The outward deeds are only expressions of our inner self. Primarily, the intent is to have us deal with the inward cause of those deeds. The "axe is set to the root of the tree."[4] We are to mortify the causes of the deeds of the flesh. The apostle calls them deeds because they are what every lust leaves behind as evidence. When lust conceives, it seems to have no effect. But its goal is to produce a perfect sin, the perfect crime – no evidence, no suspect.

In the beginning of chapter 8, and again in 8:7, Paul treats indwelling lust and sin as the source of all sinful actions. He mentions its destruction using the effects it produces. By a twist of the phrase, "Carnal minds"[5] [NT:4561 sarx], are no different than the "passions and lusts of the flesh"[6] [also NT:4561 sarx]. The deeds and fruits of the flesh arise from the carnal mind; and this is the sense in which the body is used in Rom. 8:10: "The body is dead because of sin."

(3.) What is meant by mortify.

"Put to death" [NT:2289 thanatoo] - This is a metaphor, taken from putting any living thing to death. To kill a man or other living thing, means to take away all his strength, vigor, and power, so that he cannot act or exert on his own. That is just what it means in this case. Indwelling sin is compared to a person, a living person, called "the old man." He has his way of thinking, his tendencies, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, and strength. This old man, says the apostle, must be killed, put to death, mortified. That is, the old man's power, life, vigor, and strength, his ability to produce effects, must be taken away by the Spirit. In fact, it is to be "crucified with Christ" as a good thing.[7] We, as the "old man," are said to be "dead" with Christ.[8] When we are resurrected in Christ and regenerated,[9] a principle contrary to the old man, one designed to destroy him,[10] is planted in our hearts. But the whole process towards perfection (Christ-like behavior) is carried on by degrees all of our life. More about this later.

The intent of the apostle in prescribing the duty to mortify sin is this: it is the constant duty of believers to mortify the indwelling sin still remaining in their mortal bodies, so that it will not have the life and power needed to produce the deeds of the flesh.

5. The promise for fulfilling this duty is life: "You will live."

The life promised is opposed to the death threatened in the previous clause, "If you live for the flesh, you will die." Paul repeats, "If you satisfy the flesh you will reap destruction."[11] Now, perhaps the word means not only eternal life, but also the spiritual life in Christ. We have that in this life, not the essence of it, but the joy, comfort, and vitality of it. As the apostle says in

another case, “Now we live, if we stand fast.”[12] In other words, “Now my life will do me good; I will have joy and comfort in my life. I will lead a good, vital, comfortable, spiritual life while I am here, and then obtain eternal life afterwards.”

As to what was said before, about the connection between mortification and eternal life, I add a second motive to the duty prescribed: that the vitality, power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.

CHAPTER 2

THE DUTY OF THE BEST BELIEVERS

- Confirming the need for mortification
- Mortification is still the duty of the best believers[13]
- Indwelling sin stays with us; there is no perfection in this life[14]
- What sin does in the life of believers[15]
- Sin's fruitfulness and tendency
- Every lust aims at the most extreme form of its kind
- The Spirit and a new nature are given to contend against indwelling sin[16]
- The fearful consequence of neglecting mortification[17]
- The first general principle of mortification – the sorrow of failing in this duty.

Having laid this foundation connecting mortification and life, the main deductions lead me to propose,

I. The first general principle: despite the death of sin on the cross, sin remains.

The best believers, who are certainly freed from the condemning Power of sin, still need to make it their business to mortify the indwelling power of sin all their life. So the apostle Paul writes, "Therefore mortify the parts of your body that belong to the earth."[18] To whom does he speak? Those who were "risen with Christ," verse 1; those who were "dead" with him, verse 3; those who have their life in Christ, and who will "appear with him in glory," verse 4. Do you mortify the sin in your life? Do you make it your daily work? Always be at this work while you live! Do not miss a day from it. You need to be killing sin, or it will be killing you. Being virtually dead with Christ, being made alive with him, will not excuse you from this work. Our Savior tells us how his Father deals with every branch in him that bears fruit, every true and living branch. "He prunes it so it may bear more fruit."[19] He prunes it, and not for a day or two, but while it continues to be a branch in this world.

And the apostle tells you what his own practice was: "I subdue my body, and bring it into submission."[20] "I do it daily;" he says, "it is the work of my life: I do not omit it; this is my business." And if this was the work and business of Paul, who was so exceptionally gifted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, and consolations, well beyond the ordinary believer, why would we be exempt from this work and duty while we are in this world? Here are a few reasons why we need to do this daily:

1. Indwelling sin stays with us while we are in this world; therefore we always need to mortify it.

The useless, foolish, and ignorant disputes we get into about keeping the commands of God perfectly, of somehow reaching perfection in this life, of being wholly and perfectly dead to sin, I will not get into now. It is more than probable that the people who promote such ideas never knew what it takes to keep any of God's commands. They are so far from perfection that they never sincerely strived for even partial obedience, much less universal obedience. And so, many in our day who talk of perfection have been wiser than we, and they assert that perfection consists in knowing no difference between good and evil. Their perfection is not in the things we

call good. Instead it is all the same to them; the height of wickedness is their perfection. Others have found a new way to perfection by denying original, indwelling sin. They bend the spirituality of God's law to men's carnal hearts. They realize that they are ignorant of the life of Christ and its power in believers, so they have invented a new righteousness that the gospel knows nothing of. They are uselessly puffed up by their fleshly minds.

There are those of us who do not dare to be wise beyond what is written, nor do we boast by other men's measure of what God has or has not done for us. We say that indwelling sin lives in us to some degree as long as we are in this world. We do not dare to speak as "though we had already attained, or were already perfect."[21] Our "inward man is to be renewed day by day" while we live here.[22] Amid the renovations of the new are the breaches and decays of the old. While we are here we "know but in part."[23] We have a darkness remaining that needs to be gradually removed by our "growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."[24] But "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we want to do,"[25] and we are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light.[26] We have a "body of death"[27] from which we are not delivered until the death of our bodies.[28] Now, having a duty to mortify, to kill sin while it is in us, we need to get to work. If someone is appointed to kill an enemy, and he ceases striking before the other ceases living, he does only half his work.[29]

2. Sin not only still abides in us, but it still acts, still labors to bring out the deeds of the flesh.

When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone. But sin is never less quiet than when it seems most quiet. Its waters are deepest when they are still. So we need to vigorously root out sin at all times and in all conditions, even where we least suspect it. Sin not only stays in us, but "the law of the members of the body is still rebelling against the law of the mind,"[30] and "the spirit that dwells in us tends to envy."[31] Sin is always at work. "The flesh opposes the Spirit."[32] Lust is still tempting and conceiving sin.[33] In every moral action, sin inclines towards evil, or it hinders good, or it disengages the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil. "The evil I do not want to do, that is just what I do," says the apostle.[34]

Why is that? "Because nothing good lives in me (that is, in my flesh)," verse 18. And sin hinders me from doing good: "The good that I want to do, I do not do," verse 19. "In the same way, either I do not do it, or I do not do it as I should; all of my holy things are being defiled by this sin."[35] "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, so that I cannot do the things that I want to do."[36] Sin distracts our spirit, and so it is called "The sin that so easily entangles us."[37] That is why the apostle has such grievous complaints about it in Romans 7.

So sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he ever had anything to do with God or for God, that indwelling sin did not have a hand in corrupting? And sin will have this impact more or less all of our life. If sin is always acting, and we are not always mortifying, then we are lost creatures. If a man stands still and allows his enemies to beat him without resistance, then he will undoubtedly be conquered. If sin is subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we are slothful, negligent, and foolish in trying to ruin its efforts, then how can we expect a good outcome? There is not a day that goes by that sin either foils or is foiled, that it either wins or loses; and it will be this way all the while we live in this world.

I will release anyone from this duty that can make sin surrender, that can bring a cessation of arms in this warfare. If sin will spare him one day, even one duty (assuming he is acquainted

with the spirituality of obedience and the subtlety of sin), he may say to his soul, "Take the day off in this duty." The saints long for deliverance from sin's bewildering rebellion. They know that the only safety against it is constant warfare.

3. Sin not only troubles us, but if left alone, it produces soul-destroying sins.

Sin not only strives, acts, rebels, troubles, and disturbs us, but if it is left alone, if it is not continually mortified, it will produce great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins. The apostle tells us what the works and the fruits of sin are. "The works of the flesh are apparent: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, jealousy, anger, strife, sedition, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, carousing, etc."[38] You know what it did in David and many others. Sin always aims at the extreme. If it had its way, every time it rises up to tempt or entice, it would go out to the most extreme sin of that kind. If it could, every unclean thought or glance would become adultery. Every covetous desire would become oppression. If it were allowed its own reign, every thought of unbelief would become atheism. Men may reach a point, where sin is so unrestrained, that it no longer stings their conscience. The most outrageous sin no longer seems scandalous. If every impulse of lust were satisfied, it would reach the height of villainy. Sin is like the grave that is never satisfied.[39]

This is part of the deceitfulness of sin, which hardens men's hearts and leads to their ruin.[40] It is subtle in its initial approach, and so we succumb to it. But once it has a hold on our heart by these little concessions, it gains a footing; and then it presses on in increasing degrees of the same kind. This continual pressing forward fools the soul into thinking the separation from God that has already happened is insignificant. It thinks that if there is no further progress, then nothing is different. To the extent the soul is made insensitive to a sin, that is, insensitive to what the gospel requires of the believer, that is the extent to which the heart is hardened. But sin still presses forward. That is because the only boundary it has is our complete relinquishment of God, and our opposition to him. Its ability to proceed towards this extreme end by degrees, and to make good the ground it has gotten by hardness, does not come from its nature, but from its deceitfulness. Nothing can prevent this infiltration but mortification. Mortification will wither the root of the sin, and strike at its head every hour, so that whatever it aims at it is thwarted. If the best saint in the world shirks this duty, he will fall into as many cursed sins as anyone else.

4. The Spirit and the new nature are given to us so we have the moral strength to oppose sin.

"The flesh lusts against the Spirit." Well, so what? "The Spirit also lusts against the flesh."[41] There is a tendency in the Spirit, or our new spiritual nature, to act against the flesh, as well as a tendency in the flesh to act against the Spirit.[42] It is our participation in the divine nature that gives us an escape from the pollution that is in the world through lust. In Rom. 7:23 we find there is a law of the mind, as well as a law of the fleshly members. When two people are fighting, it is unjust and unreasonable to bind one and leave the other at liberty to wound him at his pleasure. In the same way, it is foolish to bind the one who fights for our eternal salvation, and leave alone the one who violently seeks our everlasting ruin. The contest is for our lives and souls! Not employing the Spirit and the new nature to mortify sin daily, is ignoring the excellent assistance that God has given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to use what we have received, God may justly hold back giving more. His graces and his gifts are bestowed on us to use, to exercise, and to trade with. Not mortifying sin daily is sinning against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God who furnished us with the help and moral strength we need to do that.

5. Neglecting this duty renews the old man, and rots the new man.

Neglecting this duty throws the soul into a condition exactly opposite to what the apostle proclaims: "Even though our outward man rots, the inward man is renewed day by day."[43] When this duty is neglected, the inward man rots, and the outward man is renewed day by day. Sin becomes like the house of David, and grace becomes like the house of Saul. Everything is turned upside-down.

Exercise and success are the two main havens of grace in the heart. When grace is abandoned, it withers and decays. The things of grace are ready to die,[44] and sin gains ground towards hardening the heart.[45] What I mean is that, by ignoring this duty, grace withers, lust flourishes, and the condition of the heart grows worse and worse. The Lord knows what desperate and fearful effects sin has had with many people. When we neglect mortification, sin gets a substantial victory, and it breaks the bones of the soul.[46] It makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die,[47] so that he cannot look up.[48] When we take blow after blow, wound after wound, foil after foil, and never rise up in vigorous opposition, can we expect anything but being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and finding our souls bleeding to death?[49]

Indeed, it is sad to consider the effects of this neglect that lie under our eyes every day. We see those whom we knew to be humble, melting, broken-hearted Christians. They were tender and afraid of offending anyone, zealous for God and all his ways, and respectful of his Sabbaths and laws. By neglecting this duty, they have grown earthly, carnal, cold, and wrathful. They conform to the men and to the things of the world, making a scandal of religion; and they become a fearful temptation to those who know them. The truth is, true evangelical mortification is almost lost among us. Some have made it earthly, legal, censoring, and partial. It is tainted with wrath, envy, malice, and pride. Others have made it seem obsolete with their pretenses of liberty and grace, and I do not know what else, trying to justify its neglect. More about that later.

6. It is our duty to be "perfecting holiness out of the fear of God."[50]

It is our duty to "grow in grace" daily.[51] It is our duty to "renew our inward man day by day."[52] Now, this cannot be done without mortifying sin day by day. Sin strongly opposes every act of holiness, and every degree to which we grow. No man should think he is making any progress in holiness if he does not walk over the dead bodies of his lusts. Anyone who does not kill sin that stands in his way is not taking any steps towards his journey's end. Anyone who finds no opposition from sin, and does not take every opportunity to mortify it, is actually at peace with sin; he is not dying to it.

This, then, is the first general principle of our ensuing discourse. Let me put it this way: despite the death of each and every sin on the cross of Christ, sin remains. Despite the foundation of mortification afforded by our conversion, our own conviction of sin, and our humiliation for sin, sin remains. Despite the new moral strength to oppose and destroy sin that has been implanted in us, sin remains. Sin has such an effect on the best of believers that, as long as they live in this world, the constant daily mortification of sin remains their obligation.

Before I proceed to the next principle, I have to complain about the many professed Christians these days who, instead of showing great and evident fruits of mortification, hardly bear any leaves of it. There is a growing popular movement attracting those who display many spiritual gifts, and who freely express their spirituality. There is a noise of religion and religious activities in every corner. There is preaching in abundance. And it is not done in the empty, light, trivial, and vain manner it once was. For the most part, it results from a spiritual gift. If you were to

measure the number of believers by the attention they draw, the number of gifts they show, or the professions they make, the church might be prompted to ask, "Where did all these followers come from?" But if you measure them by their fruits of mortification, this great discriminating grace of Christians, perhaps their number is not so large.

There are so many of those who converted during this popular movement, who talk about and profess their faith with a level of spirituality seldom seen before. But unfortunately, they give evidence of a miserably unmortified heart. I will not judge them, but perhaps boast about what the Lord has done in them. If wasting time, idleness, squandering time in clubs, envy, strife, quarreling, jealousy, anger, pride, worldliness, and selfishness[53] are badges of Christians, then we have them among us in abundance. And if such behavior can be found in those who have so much light, and which, we hope, is saving light, then what do we say about some who would like to be called religious and yet despise the light of the gospel? What do we say about those who know no more of the duty we are discussing than occasionally denying themselves a few outward, harmless, and seldom practiced enjoyments? May the good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our diseased state, or we will wind up in a sad condition!

Two evils accompany every unmortified professor of faith.

There are two evils which certainly accompany every unmortified professor of faith: the first is found in himself, and the other is found in respect to others –

1. The evil in himself.

He can pretend not to, but he has careless thoughts of sin, sins of daily weakness. The sign of an unmortified sinful habit is being able to digest the sin without any bitterness in the heart. A man may imagine the kind of grace and mercy that will allow him to swallow and digest his daily sins without bitterness. When he does, he is at the brink of turning the grace of God into lewdness, and of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. There is no greater evidence of a false and rotten heart, than to be able to trade that grace and mercy for the sinful habit.

The blood of Christ is given to cleanse us.[54] Christ lifted up gives us repentance.[55] The doctrine of grace teaches us to deny all ungodliness.[56] Using these to cloak and approve sin, is a rebellion that will break the bones. Most of the professors of Christ who have fallen from grace in our day, have departed us through this door of unmortified sin. For awhile most of them had ideological convictions; those convictions kept them to their duties and brought them to a profession of faith. In this way they "escaped the pollution that is in the world, through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."[57] But enticed only by the doctrine of the gospel, and being weary of duty (for which they had no moral foundation), they neglected numerous requirements of the doctrine of grace. Once this evil laid hold of them, they quickly fell into damnation.

2. The evil in relation to others around them.

This has two evil influences on unmortified professors of Christ –

(I.) It hardens them, by persuading them that they are as good as the best professors of Christ. Whatever they see exemplified in the best professors, is so colored by their own lack of mortification, that it has no value to them. They have a zeal for religion, but they lack restraint and universal righteousness. They reject wastefulness, but practice worldliness. They separate from the world; but living entirely to themselves, they take no care to exercise loving-kindness. Or they talk spiritually, but they live in vanity. They mention communion with God, but they are conformed to the world in every way. They boast of the forgiveness of sin, and yet they never forgive others. And with such mindsets, these poor creatures harden their hearts

by their unrepentance.

(2.) They deceive others, by making them believe it would be good if everyone could be as spiritual as they purport to be. And so it becomes an easy thing for others to be tempted by religious fame, and to go far beyond what they see in these false professors. Yet, they will still come short of eternal life.

But this, and all the evils of walking without mortifying sin, will come later.[58]

CHAPTER 3

FALSE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

- Confirming the second general principle of the means of mortification
- The Spirit is the only author of this work
- Discovering the uselessness of the Roman Catholic ritualized mortification
- Many means used by the Roman Catholic church are not specified by God
- Those means which are specified by him are abused
- The mistakes of others in this business
- The Spirit is promised to believers for this work[59]
- All that we receive from Christ is by the Spirit
- How the Spirit mortifies sin[60]
- Several ways the Spirit operates in this endeavor
- How the Spirit's ways work, and our duty in that work

The next principle involves the sovereign cause of mortification, which is the Holy Spirit.

II. The second general principle: Only the Spirit is sufficient to do this work of mortification;

Any other ways or means of mortifying sin apart from him will have no effect. He acts directly to do it, and he works in us just as he pleases.

1. Men seek other remedies in vain.

Men will not be healed by other remedies. The specific ways that are prescribed by God to mortify sin are known to us. A lot of the Roman Catholic religion and its practices consist of mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretense of their rough garments; they deceive themselves. Their vows, orders, fasting, and penance, are all built on this false groundwork; they are all meant to mortify sin. Their preaching, sermons, and books of devotion, all look this way. That is why some think the locusts that came out of the bottomless pit are the friars of the Roman Catholic church (Rev. 9:3). They are said to torment men to the point that "they seek death but cannot find it" (verse 6). These interpreters think the friars tormented men by their stinging sermons, through which they convinced them of sin. But being unable to discover the remedy which could heal and mortify the sin, they kept these people in such perpetual anguish and terror, and so troubled their consciences, that they desired to die.

This is the core of their religion. They labor to mortify the sins of dead creatures [prayer for the dead] because they are ignorant of the nature and purpose of mortification. They mix poison with it by trying to persuade us of its merit. The call it supererogation (going beyond what is necessary to merit God's favor). The term itself is proud and barbarous. Their glory in this ritual is actually their shame – more about them and their practice of mortification in chapter 7.

It is known that the ways and means they invented to mortify sin are still prescribed for the same purpose by some who should know better from the gospel. Directions to this effect have lately been given by some, even those professing to be Protestants. It would have been more appropriate coming from Roman Catholic devotees three or four hundred years ago. Such outside efforts, such physical exercises, such self-performances, such merely legal duties, without the least mention of Christ or his Spirit, are varnished over with swelling words of vanity

as the only effective means to mortify sin. This reveals a deep-rooted ignorance of the power of God and the mystery of the gospel. That was one reason for publishing this paper.

Two reasons, among others, why the Roman Catholics cannot truly mortify sin with all their endeavors are these:

(1.) Because many of the ways and means they use were never designated by God for that purpose. (Nothing in religion has any effect unless it has been designated by God for that purpose). Examples of these are their rough garments, their vows, penances, disciplines, monastic life, and the like. God will ask, "Who has required these things of you?" and then he will say, "You worship me in vain, teaching doctrines that come from the traditions of men." The same sort of self-punishment is advocated by others.

(2.) Because they do not properly use the things that are designated by God as a means of mortification. These include praying, fasting, watching, meditation, and the like. These have their use in the business in hand, but where they are meant to be streams flowing from other fountains, they consider them fountains in themselves. That is, they are only the means to an effect, secondary to the Spirit and to faith. But they consider them virtues in themselves. If they fast so much, and pray so much, and keep their hours and times, then the work is done. As the apostle says in another case, "They are always learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth." In this case, they are always mortifying, but they never really kill anything. In brief, they have a lot of means to mortify the natural man living the natural life, but none to mortify lust or corruption.

This is the usual mistake people make who are ignorant of the gospel about this thing. It is the basis of a lot of superstition and will-worship in the world. What horrible starvation some of the ancient authors practiced in their monastic devotion! What violence they did to their nature! What extreme suffering they put themselves under! Search for the basis for such behavior and beliefs, and you will find they all made the same mistake. In attempting such rigid mortification, they struck at the natural man instead of the corrupt old man; they struck the body in which we live instead of the body of death.

The natural practices of others will not do it either. Men are exasperated with the guilt of a sin that has succeeded against them. They instantly promise themselves and God that they will not do it anymore. They keep a close watch on themselves. They pray for awhile until the fever of it goes away, and the sense of sin is worn off. But then mortification goes away as well. The sin returns to its former control. Duties may be excellent food for a weak soul, but they are no medicine for a sick soul. The person that turns his meat into his medicine cannot expect some great turn of events. Spiritually sick men cannot sweat out their disease by working. But this is what men are doing when they deceive their own souls, as we shall see later.

It is evident from the nature of the work itself that none of these ways are enough to accomplish the task. It is a work that requires so many concurrent actions that no self-effort can attain it. It requires an almighty energy to accomplish, as will be made evident shortly.

2. It is the work of the Spirit.

This is so because,

(1.) God promised to give the Spirit to us to do this work.

The work of mortification in general takes away the stony heart, that is, the stubborn, proud, rebellious, and unbelieving heart. This is still promised to be done by the Spirit, "I will give my Spirit, and take away the stony heart."[61] And this work is done by the Spirit of God when all our

own ways fail.[62]

(2.) Mortification is a gift of Christ, and all the gifts of Christ come to us by the Spirit of Christ.

"Without Christ we can do nothing."[63] All of our supplies and relief, each exercise of grace from him, are communicated to us by the Spirit. It is through the Spirit that Christ works exclusively in and on believers. From Christ we have our mortification: "He is lifted up and made a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to us."[64] And our mortification is no part of our repentance. How does he do it? Having "received the promise of the Holy Ghost," [65] Christ pours him out for that purpose. You know the various promises he made to send the Spirit. As Tertullian said, "Vicariam navare operam," he is vicariously doing the works that Christ had to accomplish in us.

The resolution of one or two questions will now lead me nearer to what I primarily want to point out. The first question is,

How does the Spirit mortify sin?

I answer that, in general, he does it in three ways –

[1.] The Spirit causes our hearts to grow in grace and in the kind of fruits that oppose the fleshly fruits, and their source. The apostle enumerates the fruits of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21, and he contrasts them with the fruits of the Spirit in verses 22, 23. They are nothing alike. But if these spiritual fruits grow in us, wouldn't the other fleshly fruit grow too? In verse 24, he says "No. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." But how? Verse 25, "By living in the Spirit and walking after the Spirit;" that is, by the growth of these Spiritual graces in us, and walking in step with them. The apostle says, "These [two kinds of fruit] are contrary one to another," verse 17; so they cannot coexist to any great degree. This "renewing of us by the Holy Ghost,"[66] as it is called, is one substantial path to mortification. The Spirit causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and prosper in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet thriving of indwelling sin.

[2.] The Spirit makes a real physical efficient attack on the root and habit of sin, to weaken, destroy, and remove it. That is why he is called a "Spirit of judgment and burning."[67] He actually consumes and destroys our lusts. He takes away the stony heart with an almighty efficiency. As he begins his work for each kind of sin, he carries it on for each degree of sin. He is the fire which burns up the very root of lust.

[3.] He brings the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith. He gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship with Christ in his sufferings. More about how that is done later.

The second question is this,

If this is the work of the Spirit alone, why are we urged to do it?

If only the Spirit of God can do it, maybe we should leave the work entirely to him.

[1.] It is only the Spirit's work in the same way that all graces and good works in us are the Spirit's. He "works in us [NT:1754 energeo "energizes"] to will and to act in accord with his own good purpose."[68] He "exercises [OT:6466] all our works in us."[69] He "fulfills [NT:4137] every work of faith with power."[70] He assists us [NT:4878,5241] to pray, and he is a "Spirit of humble prayer."[71] And yet we are rightly exhorted to do all these things.

[2.] He does not work out our mortification in any way that keeps it from being our act of obedience. The Holy Ghost works in us and on us in a way that is consistent with who we are, a way that preserves our own liberty and free obedience. He works on our understanding, our will, our conscience, and our desires, consistent with the nature of each. He works in us and with us, not against us or without us. His assistance is an encouragement to complete the work, and not an excuse to neglect it.

Indeed, I might take time here to sorrow over the endless and foolish efforts people make when they are convicted of their own sin. They manage to restrain it by countless, and bewildering rituals. But being strangers to the Spirit of God, all of this is done in vain. They fight without victory and have war without peace. They are in slavery all their life. They spend their strength on something that will not satisfy their hunger, laboring for what cannot benefit them.

This is the saddest warfare any person can be engaged in. Someone who is powerfully convicted by the law, is pressed to fight against sin. But he has no strength for the combat. He can only fight; he can never conquer. Such people are like men purposely thrown on their enemy's sword to be slain. The law drives them on, and sin beats them back. Sometimes they think they have foiled sin, when all they have done is raise a cloud of dust to keep from seeing it. They mistake their natural fear, sorrow, and anguish for an indication that sin is conquered. In reality, it is not even touched. By that time they are exhausted, and yet they must enter into the battle again. The lust they thought was slain appears to have no wound.

If the case is so sad with those who are lost, but at least make the effort, then what is the condition of those who despise all this? What of those who are under the perpetual power and control of sin, who love it, and who worry only that they cannot satiate the desires of the flesh?

CHAPTER 4

USEFULNESS OF MORTIFICATION

- The last principle is the usefulness of mortification
- The strength and comfort of our spiritual lives greatly depend on our mortification
- In what sense this dependence is true
- The dependence is not absolute and necessary; Ps. 88, Heman's condition
- The dependence is not immediate and conditional
- Removing the contrary as a means of proof
- The effect of any unmortified lust is to weaken and darken the soul, Ps. 38:3,8
- All graces are enriched by the mortification of sin
- The best evidence of sincerity

Besides the necessity of mortification to life, and the certainty of life after mortification, the last principle I emphasize is this:

III. The third general principle: the vitality of our spiritual life greatly depends on our mortification of sin.

Strength and comfort, or power and peace, are the things we desire in our walk with God. If any of us were asked seriously, what troubles us, we would point to one of these. We want strength, power, vitality, and life in our walk with God, that is, in our obedience, or we want peace, comfort, and consolation in that walk. Whatever else a believer may encounter, is not worth mentioning or complaining about.

Now, all of these greatly depend on a constant course of mortification. Observe that,

1. Life, strength and comfort in our spiritual life are not the necessary result of mortification.

They do not result from it as though they were necessarily tied to it. A man may follow a constant course of mortification all his life, and yet perhaps never enjoy a good day of peace and consolation. That is how it was with Heman.[72] He lived a life of perpetual mortification, and walked with God. Yet terrors and wounds followed him all his life. God singled out Heman, a good friend, to make him an example for others who might be in distress. Can you complain if you suffer as Heman did, though he was a prominent servant of God? This will be his praise to the end of the world. It is God's prerogative whether to speak peace and consolation to us. "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners." How does God do this? He creates it, and speaks it. "I create the fruit of the lips: 'Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near,' says the LORD, 'And I will heal him.'"[73] It is our choice whether to use the means God has provided to obtain peace. But bestowing the means of peace is God's choice.

2. Life, strength and comfort in our spiritual life are privileges, not rights.

Mortification is not the immediate cause for any of God's providing us life, vigor, courage, and consolation. These things are the privileges of our adoption. The Spirit informs our soul when they are present. "The Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God."[74] He is the one who gives us a new name, a white stone, adoption, and justification. So the immediate cause of these things is the sense and knowledge we have of our adoption and

justification, delivered in the hand of the Spirit.

I have to say that, nonetheless,

3. Life, strength, and comfort in our spiritual life greatly depend on mortification.

In our ordinary walk with God, and in his ordinary course of dealing with us, the strength and comfort of our spiritual life greatly depends on our mortification. Mortification is not only the "causa sine qua non," the indispensable cause, but it has an effectual influence on it. For,

(1.) Mortification alone keeps sin from depriving us of them.

Every unmortified sin will certainly do two things: -- [1.] It will weaken the soul, and deprive it of its vigor. [2.] It will darken the soul, and deprive it of its comfort and peace.

[1.] Unmortified sin weakens the soul, and deprives it of its strength. When David harbored an unmortified lust in his heart, it broke all his bones, and left him no spiritual strength. For this reason, he complained that he was sick, weak, wounded, and faint. "There is," he says, "no health in me."[75] "I am feeble and sore broken," verse 8; "I cannot even look up."[76] An unmortified lust will sap the spirit of all its vigor, weakening it for anything we do. For,

1st. It brings the heart itself into disharmony, and weakens its attitude by misdirecting its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual frame that is required for healthy communion with God. It grabs the affections, making itself the object that is most beloved and desirable. It thereby displaces the love of the Father.[77] In this way, the soul cannot truthfully say to God, "You are all I need," because it has something else that it loves. Fear, desire, and hope, which are choice affections of the soul and should be full of God, become entangled with this unmortified sin.

2nd. It fills our thoughts with plots and schemes about it. Thoughts are the great procurers of the soul. They find the provisions needed to satisfy the soul's affections. If sin remains unmortified in the heart, then thoughts will always make provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. They will enamel, adorn, and dress the objects of the flesh, and then bring them home to give satisfaction to the flesh. They do this in the service of a defiled imagination that is beyond description.

3rd. It breaks out of the mind and actually hinders our physical duty as well. When he should be worshipping God, the ambitious man is driven to study, the worldly one is driven to scheme, and the sensual person is driven to provide himself with all the adornments of his vanity.

If I were to list the breaches, ruin, weakness, and destruction that one unmortified lust will bring to us, this discourse would expand far beyond its subject.

[2.] As sin weakens the soul, it darkens the soul. It is a thick cloud that spreads itself over the face of the soul and blocks all the light of God's love and favor. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption. If the soul entertains thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them.

This is where the strength and power of our spiritual life depend on our mortification. It is the only way to remove the thing that denies us the strength or comfort we want. Men that are sick and wounded under the power of lust make many cries for help. They cry to God when the confusion of their thoughts overwhelms them, but they are not rescued. They try other remedies In vain. "They will not be healed."[78] "Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound," but nothing will cure them until they come to "acknowledge their offense,"

verse 15. Men may see their sickness and wounds, but if they do not come to God to acknowledge their sin, and mortify it, they will not be cured.

(2.) Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them to grow in our hearts.

The life and vigor of our spiritual lives is found in the vigor and flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts. If a precious herb is planted in a garden, and the ground is not tilled, then weeds will grow around it. Perhaps it survives, but it will be a poor, withering, useless thing. You may have to search diligently to find it. When you do, you will scarcely recognize it as the plant you're looking for. Even if it is, you cannot use it. Set another plant of the same kind in the ground, as barren and as bad as the other one you found. But let this one be well-weeded, fed, watered, and protected, and it will flourish and thrive. You can find it at your first glance into the garden, and you will have it for your use when you please. That is how it is with the graces of the Spirit that are planted in our hearts.

The graces of the Spirit are still present. They can abide in a heart where mortification has been neglected some, but they will be near death.[79] They are withering and decaying. This heart is like the lazy man's field. It is so overgrown with weeds that you can hardly see the good corn. Such a man may search for faith, love, and zeal, and hardly find any. If he can discover these graces, still alive and sincere, they will be so weak, so clogged with lusts, that they are of little use. But cleanse this heart by mortification, constantly and daily uproot the weeds of lust (because it is their nature to spring up daily), provide room for grace to thrive and flourish, and every grace will act its part and be ready for every use and purpose!

(3.) Mortification, sincerely applied, produces peace.

I know of nothing that is done with sincerity that does not produce peace. Sincerity is no small foundation of peace. And mortification is the soul's vigorous opposition to self. As such, it is the duty in which sincerity will be most evident. Therefore, the path to peace is found in the sincere application of mortification to our walk.

CHAPTER 5

MORTIFICATION NEGATIVELY CONSIDERED

- The principal intent of the whole discourse
- The primary case of conscience
- What mortifying a sin is not (negative considerations)
- It is not completely destroying sin in this life
- It is not disguising sin
- It is not improving some natural disposition
- It is not diverting sin
- It is not an occasional conquest of sin
- Occasional conquests of sin, handling its outbreaks; times of danger

Having begun with the general principles of mortification, I come now to handling some practical cases that arise in this business of mortifying sin in believers.

The first, which encompasses all the rest, lies under the following proposal:

How do we fight indwelling sin in a way that maintains peace in our communion with God?

Suppose a man is a true believer, and yet he discovers a powerful indwelling sin that holds him captive to the law. It consumes his heart with trouble, confuses his thoughts, and weakens his soul with regard to his duties of communion with God. It disquiets his peace. Perhaps it defiles his conscience, and hardens him through the deceitfulness of sin. What can he do? What course can he take to mortify this sin, lust, compulsion, or corruption? Even though the sin is not completely destroyed, how can this man continue his contest with it in a way that maintains power, strength, and peace in his communion with God?

In answer to this important inquiry, I will do the following:

Chapters 5 and 6 – The first principle of mortifying sin: show what it means to mortify a sin, both negatively (Chapter 5) and positively (Chapter 6). This is so that we will not be mistaken in laying the foundation for this endeavor.

Chapter 7 – The second principle: The ways and means a soul may use to mortify a particular lust. I will give some general rules for what is absolutely necessary to mortify a sin. The first general rule is to be sure to gain an interest in Christ. If you intend to mortify a sin without relying on Christ, it will never be done

Chapter 8 – The second general rule: lay out how this is to be done. In considering this course of action, it is not the doctrine of mortification in general that I am addressing, but the specific cases proposed.

Chapter 9 – Based on the two principles mentioned, I will give particular directions for guidance when a believer is under the weight of a disquieting lust or compulsion.

I. Mortifying a Sin -

1. Negatively

(1.) Mortifying a sin does not mean completely killing it.

It does not root out and destroy it so that it no longer has any hold on us, or no longer resides in our hearts. This is the target, but it will not be accomplished in this life. Every man whose heart is set on mortifying a sin, intends to completely destroy it. He does not want to leave either root or fruit in his heart or in his life. He wants to kill it in such a way that it will never move or stir again. It will never cry or call, seduce or tempt, from now to eternity. He wants it exterminated. Now, by the Spirit and grace of Christ, there may be wonderful success, and an over-riding victory against a sin. He may realize nearly constant triumph over it. Even so, absolutely killing and destroying it should not be expected in this life.

Paul assures us of this fact with his caveat, "It is not as though I had already attained the power of the resurrection, nor had already become perfect."[80] He was a choice saint, a pattern for believers. He was one who in faith, love, and all the fruits of the Spirit, had no equal in the world. On that account, he ascribes perfection to himself in comparison to others, verse 15. He had not yet "attained," he was not yet "perfect," but he was "following after." He still had a corruptible body, just as we have, that must be changed at last by the great power of Christ, verse 21. This is what we want to have. But God thinks it best for us to be complete in nothing by ourselves. In all things we must be "complete in Christ."[81]

(2.) Mortifying a sin does not mean disguising the sin.

When a man gives up practicing a sin only in some outward respects, others may see him as a changed man. But God knows that he has now added hypocrisy to his former sinfulness, and that he is now on a straighter path to hell than he was before. His heart has only become more cunning. He does not have a new heart that is more holy.

(3.) Mortifying a sin is not changing our natural disposition to a quiet, sedate one.

Some men have an advantage by their natural constitution. They do not have violent and unruly passions as many others do. If such men cultivate and improve their natural state by discipline, consideration, and prudence, then they may seem to be very mortified men, to themselves and to others. In reality their hearts may be a cesspool. Some people may never be bothered by the same kind of anger and unruly passions in a lifetime, that bother someone else every day. And yet the latter may have done more to mortify his sin than the former. They shouldn't judge their mortification by the things that their natural state gives no life or vigor to. They need to judge themselves by their self-denial, unbelief, envy, or some other spiritual sin. Then they will have a clearer view of themselves.

(4.) Mortifying a sin is not diverting the sin to another outlet.

Simon Magus left his sorcery for awhile, but his covetousness and ambition remained; and so it would have found another release. Therefore Peter tells him, "I see you are filled with bitterness."[82] In effect he is saying, "Despite the profession you made, despite abandoning your sorcery, your lust is as powerful as ever. It is the same lust, only its streams are diverted. It flows another way now, but it is still the old bitterness." A man may recognize a lust, resolve to prevent its outburst, and take every precaution to ensure it will not break out again. But the same corrupted habit simply vents itself some other way. It is like someone who heals a weeping sore and thinks he's cured. But his flesh is still infected, and it breaks out in another place.

This diversion of sin, with its altered behavior, is often brought about by changes in areas of our life that have nothing to do with grace. A change in our relations, interests, or plans may bring it about. A change in a man's constitution, brought on by natural progress in the course of his life, may produce such changes. Older men do not usually continue in their pursuit of youthful lusts, even though they never mortified them. It is the same as bartering lusts, leaving

one to serve another. A man may exchange pride for worldliness, sensuality for legalism, pride in himself for the contempt of others. He shouldn't think he mortified a sin just because he abandoned it for another. He has changed his master, but he remains a servant to his sin.

(5.) Mortifying a sin is not getting occasional victories over it.

There are two occasions or seasons when a man who is wrestling with a sin may think he has mortified it:

[1.] It happens when he has a regrettable outburst that rattles his complacency and terrorizes his conscience, It has a potential for scandal, and it obviously provokes God. This is a wakeup call that shocks and startles him. It fills him with disgust for his sin and for himself. This sends him to God, and makes him cry out as for his very life. It stimulates him to abhor his lust like hell itself, and so he sets himself against it. Now that the whole man, both spiritual and natural, has been awakened, sin pulls in its head. It takes a low profile, and seems dead before him. It is like someone who sneaks into an army camp at night and kills an officer. Instantly the guards awake. The men are roused, and a search begins for the enemy. In the meantime, the killer hides himself until the uproar is over, or he lies down like someone who is dead. Yet he is firmly resolved to do the same thing again, as soon as he has an opportunity.

When the Corinthians were accused of sin, they quickly mustered themselves to destroy it.[83] It is the same way when a person's conscience has been pierced, perhaps by his lust in an outbreak of actual sin. Caring, indignation, desire, fear, revenge, all with axe in hand, are bent on working against the sin. And so, for a season, the lust is quiet. It has been run to ground like a fox in a hunt. But when the hurry is over and the inquest is past, the thief appears again, alive, and as busy as ever at his work.

[2.] It happens when he is convinced that he has mortified it in the crucible of some judgment, disaster, or pressing hardship. The heart is consumed with thoughts of how to flee from the present troubles, fears, and dangers of his sin. A person convicted in this way, believes he can escape only by relinquishing his sin to gain peace with God. It is the anger of God that disturbs him. To be rid of God's anger, men resolve to put away their sin. They vow that sin will never again have a place in them. They will never serve it again. Accordingly, the sin is quiet. It does not stir. It seems to be mortified. It is not that it has received a wound. It is merely because the person's soul has regained its faculties. It asserts itself with thoughts that are inconsistent with the behavior of sin. Once such thoughts are laid aside, sin returns to its former life and vigor.

In Psalms, the Israelites provide a good example of this frame of mind: "Despite all this, they continued to sin, and did not believe his wondrous works. Therefore God consumed their days in futility, and their years in trouble. When he killed them, then they sought him. Then they returned to him, and inquired after him early. They remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they flattered him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues. Their heart was not right with him, nor were they true to his covenant."[84]

I have no doubt that when they sought him, and returned to him, and inquired after God early, they fully intended to relinquish their sins. It is expressed in the word "returned." To turn or to return to the Lord is done by relinquishing sin. They did this "early," with earnestness and diligence. And yet, despite all this, their sin was unmortified, verses 36, 37. This can be the state we are in after numerous defeats under trial. This can often lead to a great deception in the hearts of believers when sin remains.

There are many other ways through which people deceive themselves, and assume they have mortified their lusts. They think they are invincible. And then they succumb again and again to sin, bringing upheaval and worry on themselves.

CHAPTER 6

MORTIFICATION DESCRIBED IN ITS PARTICULARS

- The mortification of sin described
- The components and degrees of mortification
- The habitual weakening of sin's root and source
- The power of lust to tempt us
- Differences in that power as to persons and times
- Constant fighting against sin
- The aspects of the fight considered
- Success against sin
- Concluding thoughts about the process

How to mortify a sin in general, to prepare for particular courses of action.

I. Mortifying a Sin -

2. Positively

(see Chapter 5 for Mortifying a Sin Negatively)

Mortifying a lust has three components:

(1.) Habitually weakening it.
(2.) Constantly fighting and contending against it.
(3.) Realizing success over it.

(1.) Habitually weakening it.

Every lust is a depraved habit or attitude that continually inclines the heart toward evil. From that, we have a description of someone who has not truly mortified his lust, "Every purpose of the thoughts of his heart is filled with evil, from morning to night."[85] He is always under the power of a strong inclination to sin. The only reason a natural man does not pursue a particular lust day and night, is because he has so many to serve. Each one cries out to be satisfied. Although he pursues his lusts in great variety, in reality he only wants to satisfy self.

Let us suppose then that the lust or compulsion is a strong, deeply-rooted, habitual inclination, of both will and affections, toward some actual sin. The sin itself is irrelevant. No matter what it is, it always stirs up fantasies, thoughts, and schemes about its object. That is why men are said to have their "hearts set on evil;" the bent of their spirits leans towards it to make "provision for the flesh."[86] A sinful, depraved habit differs from all natural or moral habits. Those incline the soul gently and appropriately to itself, while sinful habits impel with violence and fierceness. That is why lusts are said to fight or wage "war against the soul,"[87] [NT:4754 strateuomai]. They rebel or rise up with the type of brutality and conflict that would be expected in a war. Romans 7:23 says we are led captive, or made captive, after sin's success in battle [NT:497 antistrateuomai]. All of these are works of great violence and fierceness.

I could make it blatantly obvious, from the description we have in Romans 7, that it darkens the mind, extinguishes our convictions, overthrows reason, blocks the power and influence of whatever hampers it, and consumes them all in flames. But this is not my present focus. The first thing we need to do in mortification is to weaken this habit of sin or lust. That way, it

cannot rise up in us to conceive, agitate, provoke, entice, and disturb us with the same intensity, seriousness, and frequency it normally does.[88]

I'd like to give one caution or rule, by the way, and it is this: though every lust by its nature equally and universally draws or drives us to sin, there are two limitations,

> [1.] A particular lust may be unexpectedly amplified, heightened, and strengthened in someone. It has life, power, and vigor far beyond what another lust might have in him, or the same lust might have in someone else. When a lust aligns with a man's personality, the season or path of his life, the right circumstances, or when Satan has a handle on it, then that lust grows severe and fierce above all others, or above the same lust in another man. That is when its intense steam darkens the mind. Even though a man knows the same boundaries, they have no power or influence on his will. Instead, the consuming lust liberates all kinds of perverted affections and passions in him.
>
> Lust gets its strength especially by temptation. When a suitable temptation meets up with a matching lust, it gives it new life, vigor, power, violence, and rage, that it did not seem to have before, nor seem to be capable of. Numerous examples of this might be listed, but that is for another treatise.
>
> [2.] Some lusts are far more obvious in their severity than others. Paul notes a difference between sexual impurity and all other sins, "Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin a man does is outside the body; but sexual immorality sins against his own body."[89] For this reason, the behavior of sexual sin tends to be more tangible, more discernible than others. Perhaps someone is consumed by love of the world, and his lust in this area is no less dominant than sexual lust would be. But it does not ignite the same consuming, forceful frenzy that sexual lust does.
>
> Consider further that such men may think they are mortified, and they may appear so in the eyes of the world. Yet they have the same dominating lust as those who cry out in astonishment when their untamed and disturbing behavior appears. Indeed, their craving is no less than those who have been driven by its power into scandalous sins. It is only that their lusts are for things that do not produce such disruption in their soul. They can be exercised more with a calmer demeanor. Or their natural temperament does not generate the same intensity as someone else's might.

I repeat, the primary thing in mortification is to weaken this habit, so that it does not drive and agitate us as much, or entice and distract us as often. We do not want it to be able to disrupt and confound us as we take away its life, vigor, promptness, and ambition. This is called "crucifying the flesh with its passions."[90] That is, we take away its blood and vitality which give it strength and power. We waste away the body of death "day by day."[91]

When a man is nailed to the cross, he struggles and toils at first. He cries out with great strength and might. But as his blood and vitality waste away, his efforts become fainter and fewer. His cries become low and hoarse, scarcely audible. In the same way, when a man first sets out to deal with a lust or a compulsion, it struggles with great violence to break loose. It cries with all seriousness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved. But when mortification spills its blood and vitality, it moves more seldom and more faintly. It cries out sparingly, and is hardly heard in the heart. Sometimes it may have a dying outburst of great vigor and strength; but that is quickly over, especially if it is kept from any meaningful success.

The apostle describes this in Romans 6, especially verse 6: "Sin," he says, "is crucified; it is nailed to the cross." To what end? "That the body of sin might be rendered useless." The

power of sin is weakened and abolished little by little, so that "we will no longer serve sin;" That is, we do it so that sin may not incline and impel us so effectively as to make us its servants, as it has done in the past. And this is not only with respect to carnal and sensual affections, or the desires of worldly things. It is not only with respect to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.[92] But it is also with respect to the flesh of the mind and will, and their natural opposition to God. Whatever the troubling disease is, and however it shows itself, either by driving us to evil or keeping us from good, the rule is the same: unless it is effectively weakened, all our efforts will miss the goal. A man may cut down the bitter fruit from an evil tree until he is exhausted. As long as the root keeps its strength and vigor, cutting down the hanging fruit will not keep the tree from bearing more.

This is the foolishness of some men. They apply themselves earnestly and diligently against an outbreak of lust, but by ignoring its underlying cause, they make little or no progress toward mortification.

(2.) Constant fighting and contending against it.

A large part of mortification is to always lay heavily into it. When sin is strong and energetic, the soul can hardly make headway against it. It sighs, groans, mourns, and is troubled by sin, but it seldom has it on the run. This is how David speaks of himself. David complains that his sin had "taken hold of him, so that he could not see."[93] He could barely fight against it! Several things are involved in fighting against sin:

[1.] A man has to know that he has this kind of enemy to deal with. He must recognize it, and consider it to be an enemy indeed. It must be destroyed by all means possible. As I said before, the contest is taxing and hazardous. It is about eternal things. When men have indifferent, fleeting thoughts of their lusts, it is not a good sign that they are mortified, nor that they are on their way to mortification. Every man must know "the plague of his own heart."[94] Without this knowledge, nothing else can be done. It is frightening to think how many have so little knowledge of the main enemy they carry in their hearts. This ignorance makes them ready to justify themselves, to reject reprimands and warnings, because they do not know they are in danger.[95]

[2.] To begin this warfare, we need to work at learning the ways, deceits, methods, opportunities, and circumstances of sin's success. That is how men deal with their enemies. They assess their enemy's plan of action, examine their motives, and consider how they have won in the past, so that they may prevent their enemy from succeeding again. This is the greatest skill we need to develop. If we take this away, then waging war, through which we've gained our greatest improvements in human wisdom and zeal, would be mindless. This is how those who are successful against lust deal with it. They contemplate it not only when it is actually tormenting, enticing, and seducing them, but in their quieter moments. They consider, "This is our enemy; this is his path and his progress to date. These are his advantages. This is how he prevailed before, and this is what he will continue to do if not prevented." So David says, "My sin is ever before me."[96]

Practical spiritual wisdom is finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of an indwelling sin. We have to consider where its greatest strength comes from, what advantage it has in various circumstances, when it has opportunities, and how it tempts us. What are its pleas, pretenses, and reasons? What are its strategies, emblems, and excuses? A good part of our warfare is to set the wisdom of the Spirit against the craft of the old man, to trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings. It is being able to say, "I recognize your old ways; I know what you are after," and so always being ready to deal with it.

[3.] We need to hinder it daily using all the things below that are painful, deadly, and destructive to it. That is the epitome of this contest. We can never think our lust is dead just because it is quiet. We need to work at giving it new wounds, new blows every day. Those are the apostle's instructions, "Kill the parts of your earthly nature."[97] While the soul is in this frame of mind and deals with sin in this way, it has the upper hand. Sin will be under the sword and dying.

(3.) Realizing success over it.

Frequent success against any lust is another piece of evidence of mortification. By success, I do not mean a mere setback for sin, so that it does not appear or succeed this time. It is gaining a victory over it, and pursuing it until we conquer it completely. For instance, any time the heart finds sin at work seducing and scheming how to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, the heart must instantly arrest sin. It must drag it before the law of God and the love of Christ. There, it must condemn and execute it.

I'm saying that when a man follows this course of action, lust is weakened at its very root. Its activities are fewer and weaker than before. They are not able to hinder his duty nor interrupt his peace. He can quietly and sedately uncover sin, fight against it, and have success. Then sin will be considerably mortified, and despite all its opposition, a man may have peace with God all his life.

These two approaches, then, will work for any troubling compulsion which perverts and corrupts our nature:

First, weaken its indwelling temperament, through which it attracts, entices, and drives us to evil, and to rebel against God. This is done by implanting and cherishing a habitual principle of grace that stands in direct opposition to it, and ruins it. By implanting and developing humility, pride is weakened; by patience, anger is weakened; by purity of mind and conscience, immorality is weakened; by heavenly-mindedness, love of this world is weakened. These are the graces of the Spirit, or they are the same grace which is variously acted out by the Holy Ghost according to the diversity of our lusts. Our same natural corruption likewise variously acts itself out according to the opportunities and circumstances it encounters.

Second, we need to promptly, eagerly, and with the power of the Spirit, fight with a battle cry against this lust by all the ways, and with all the means and aid, that are at our disposal. Success largely depends on these two things.

Now this: if the compulsion does not have an insurmountable advantage from its natural situation, we can expect its complete conquest so that we may never feel its opposition again. We can rise to a level of peace in our conscience that matches the true meaning of the covenant of grace.

CHAPTER 7

MORTIFICATION: THE WORK OF BELIEVERS

- General rules necessary to mortify a lust
- There is no mortification for non-believers
- The dangers of unregenerate people attempting mortification of sin
- Considering the duty of unconverted persons to this business of mortification
- The vanity of the Roman Catholics' attempts at, and rules for, mortification.

Next we consider the Second Principle,

II: The ways and means we may use to mortify any particular sin

Satan may take advantage of these means to distract and weaken us. There are some general rules concerning the basis of this work that are foundational to success. No one, no matter how convicted and resolved he is to mortify his sins, can achieve success apart from these rules. The general rules necessary to mortify sin are these:

1. Be sure to get an interest in Christ. If you intend to mortify any sin without it, it will never be done. Unless a man is a believer, he cannot mortify a single sin. Mortification is the unique work of faith.

2. Without being sincere and diligent to mortify <u>all</u> lusts, we cannot mortify a <u>single</u> lust (see Chapter 8).

1. The 1st general rule: be sure to get an interest in Christ.

(1.) Unless a man is a believer, he cannot mortify a single sin.

By "believer", I mean someone who is truly grafted into Christ. I am not saying unless a man thinks he is a believer, but unless he is indeed a believer. Mortification is the work of believers. "If you through the Spirit,"[98] etc. You believers have no condemnation.[99] Believers alone are exhorted to mortify. "Mortify therefore the parts of your body that belong to the earth."[100] Who should mortify? You who "are risen with Christ,"[101] whose "life is hid with Christ in God," verse 5; who "shall appear with him in glory," verse 4.

An unregenerate man may do something similar to it, but he can never perform the work itself in a way that would be acceptable to God. Some of the philosophers, such as Seneca, Tully, and Epictetus, have written in stirring terms of the contempt they have for the world and its self-indulgence. They have written of the need to control and conquer all excessive desires and emotions! Their lives made it evident that their maxims differed as much from true mortification as the sun painted on a sign-post differs from the sun in the sky. They had neither light nor heat. Their own Lucian represents quite adequately what they all were [a rhetorician for hire and amusement].

There is no death of sin without the death of Christ. You are familiar with the attempts the Roman Catholics made to mortify sin apart from Christ in their vows, penances, and indulgences. I might say of their practices what Paul says of Israel concerning righteousness: "They have pursued mortification, but they have not attained it. Why not? Because they do not seek it by faith, but by works of the law."[102] The same is true of those who, in obedience to their convictions and awakened consciences, attempt to relinquish sin. They follow after it, but

do not attain it.

Every person who hears the law or gospel preached, is required to mortify sin. It is his duty, but it is not his immediate duty. It is his duty to do it, but he must do it in God's way. If you require your employee to pay a bill for you, but you require that he first go to the bank to withdraw cash, then his duty to pay the bill is not his immediate duty. You will blame him if he fails to pay it, but according to your directions, his first duty was to withdraw cash from the bank. That is the case here: sin must be mortified, but something must be done first to enable us to mortify it.

I proved that it is the Spirit alone who can mortify sin. He was promised to us for that purpose. All other means of doing it without him are empty and useless. How can anyone who does not have the Spirit mortify sin? It would be easier to see without eyes, or speak without a tongue, than to truly mortify sin without the Spirit. How do we obtain the Spirit? It is the Spirit of Christ. As the apostle says, "If we do not have the Spirit of Christ, we do not have Christ."[103] So, if we are Christ's, and we have an interest in him, then we have the Spirit, and we have the power to mortify.

The apostle discusses this extensively in Rom. 8:8. "Those in the flesh cannot please God." It is the conclusion he draws from his preceding comment about our natural state, in which we have enmity with God and his law. If we are in the flesh, and we do not have the Spirit, then we cannot do anything to please God. But how can we be rescued from this condition? Verse 9: "But you are not in the flesh. You are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you." "You believers, who have the Spirit of Christ, are not in the flesh." There is no rescue from being in the flesh except by the Spirit of Christ. And if this Spirit of Christ is in you, then you are mortified. "The body is dead because of sin," verse 10, or at least it is dead to sin. If we have the Spirit, then mortification is carried on, and the new man is made alive to righteousness. The apostle proves this in verse 11. From the union we have with Christ by the Spirit, similar changes will be produced in us that were produced in him. Therefore, all attempts to mortify a lust without an interest in Christ are pointless.

Many men that are chafed by sin, by Christ's convicting arrows, by the preaching of the word, or by some adversity that pierced their hearts, vigorously set themselves against the lust that most troubles their conscience. But they labor in the fire, and their work is consumed. When the Spirit of Christ comes to this work he will be "like a refiner's fire and like cleaning soap," and he will purge men like a refiner of gold and silver.[104] He will take away their waste and impurities, their filth and blood, as in Isa. 4:4. But men must first be made of gold and silver to have refining do them any good. The prophet Jeremiah gives us the sad account of the ultimate attempts at mortification made by wicked men: "The bellows are burned, and the lead is consumed in the fire; the founder melts in vain. Men will call them rejected silver, because the LORD has rejected them."[105] And what is the reason? Verse 28, They were "brass and iron" when they were put into the furnace. Men cannot refine brass and iron long enough to turn them into good silver.

Mortification is not the business of unregenerate men. God does not call them to it yet. Conversion is their first duty and work. And it is the conversion of the whole soul, not the mortification of this or that particular lust. You would laugh at a man who sets up a large structure without laying a foundation. Especially if you had seen him repeat the fiasco a thousand times. He builds it one day only to see it fall the next. So it is with people who are convinced their way is right. Though they can plainly see that the ground they gain against sin one day is lost another, they continue on the same road without asking where the flaw lies in

their progress.

When the Jews, convicted of their sin, were cut to the heart and cried out, "What shall we do?"[106] what does Peter direct them to do? Does he ask them to mortify their pride, anger, malice, cruelty, and the like? No! He knew that was not their present work. He calls them instead to conversion and faith in Christ, verse 38. Convert the soul first, and then, "looking on the One they pierced,"[107] humiliation and mortification will ensue. In the same way, when John came to preach repentance and conversion, he said, "The axe is now set to the root of the tree."[108] The Pharisees had been laying heavy burdens on the people, imposing tedious duties, and requiring rigid means of mortification by fasting, washing, and the like. All of this served no purpose. John says essentially, "The doctrine of conversion is for you; the axe in my hand is laid to the root of your problem."

And our Savior tells us what to do in this case, "Do men pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?"[109] Suppose a thorn is well-pruned, and well taken care of? "Nonetheless, it will never bear figs," verses 17,18. It cannot be any other way. Every tree bears fruit of its own kind. What must be done, he tells us, is this: "Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good."[110] The root must be dealt with. The nature of the tree must be changed, or it cannot bear good fruit.

This is the point I am trying to make: unless a man is saved, unless he is a believer, all attempts he makes to mortify sin are useless. No matter how deceptively attractive or promising his efforts, whatever diligence, earnestness, watchfulness, and good intentions he may have, his efforts are useless. He will try many cures in vain, and he will not be healed.

In fact, there are several nasty evils which accompany efforts by non-believers to mortify sin:

[1.] His mind is consumed by something that is not the man's proper business, and so he is diverted from something that is his business. By his Word and his judgments, God has laid hold of a sin in him. He chafes the man's conscience, troubles his heart, and deprives him of his rest, so that other diversions will not serve his needs. The man is supposed to apply himself to the work in front of him. And that work is to awaken and consider his condition apart from God, his need to be brought home to God. Instead, he sets out to mortify the sin that chafes him. This attempt to be freed from his trouble is a pure case of self-love. This is not the work he is called to at all. And so he is distracted from his true work. God tells us similarly of the tribe of Ephraim, when he "spread his net on them, and brought them down like the fowls of heaven, and chastised them."[111] He caught them, entangled them, and convinced them that they could not escape from him, nor find solutions elsewhere. "They return, but not to the Most High." They were determined to relinquish their sin, but not the way God called for, which was by complete conversion.

Thus, men are diverted from truly coming to God by devising their own ingenious ways to come to him. This is one of the most common deceits by which men ruin their souls. I wish some did not teach this deceit. They make it their business to smear weakened mortar on the things of God. They cause people to err from ignorance. What do men do, what are they often directed to do, when their consciences are chafed by sin and uneasiness because the Lord has taken hold of them? Are they not told to give up the sin they are troubled by? And after making some headway against it, do they not devote themselves all the more to it? But in the end, these convictions have cost them the aim of the gospel. This is how men remain in their sin and rot.

[2.] This duty of mortification is a good thing in its proper place. It is a duty that evidences sincerity, and brings peace to the conscience. A man might conclude he is in good shape if

he is committed to this duty. His mind and heart are set against a particular sin, and he is resolved to have no more to do with it. But he deludes himself because,

1. When a man's conscience is sickened with sin, and he can find no rest, he should go to the great Physician of souls to be healed in his blood. But the man who merely wants to pacify his conscience by ending a sin, sits down without going to Christ at all. There are so many who are deceived out of eternity this way! "When Ephraim saw his sickness, he sent to king Jareb."[112] That kept him from God. The entire Roman Catholic religion is comprised of designs and schemes to pacify the conscience without Christ, as described by the apostle in Rom. 10:3.

2. By doing this, men convince themselves that they are all right. After all, it is a good work, and they are not doing it to be seen. They are sincere. But all this does is harden them in a kind of self-righteousness.

[3.] When a man has pursued this course for awhile, and deceived himself by it, he finds over the course of his life that indeed his sin has not been mortified. It has simply taken a new form. He begins to think that he is wasting his time. He will never be able to prevail. He is only building a dam against constantly rising waters. That is when he gives up, despairing of any success. He yields himself to the power of sin and the formality of fighting it.

This is the usual result for people who attempt to mortify sin without first obtaining an interest in Christ. It deludes them, hardens them, and destroys them. The most loathsome and desperate sinners in the world are those who pursued this course out of conviction, found it fruitless, and then deserted it without discovering Christ. This is the basis of all the world's formalist religions, and all those in the Roman congregation who are drawn to mortification. They think they can force Indians into baptism, or cattle to water. I repeat, mortification is for believers and believers only. Killing sin is the work of living men. When men are dead, as unbelievers are dead, sin is alive, and it continues to live.

(2.) Mortification is the work of faith, and the unique work of faith.

If something can be achieved by only one means, it is madness to attempt it another way. It is faith that purifies the heart,[113] or, as Peter says, we "purify our souls by obeying the truth through the Spirit."[114] Without faith, it will not be done.

What has been spoken is sufficient, I suppose, to prove my first general rule: Be sure to get an interest in Christ; if you intend to mortify a sin without it, it will never be done.

Objection. You may say, "What should non-believers do when they are convinced of the evil of sin? Should they stop fighting against it? Should they live without moral constraints, give their lusts free reign, and join the ranks of the worst of men? This is a good way to put the whole world into chaos. It will return us to the dark ages, open the flood-gates of lust, and spur men to rush into sin with delight like a horse into battle."

Ans. 1. God forbid! It is a testament to the wisdom, goodness, and love of God, that by numerous ways and means, he restrains the sons of men. He keeps them from pursuing the excessive and riotous behavior that their depraved nature would violently lead them to. By whatever means he does this, it demonstrates the care, kindness, and goodness of God that he keeps the whole earth from being a hell of sin and confusion.

Ans. 2. There is a unique convincing power in the word, which God is often pleased to display. It wounds, amazes, and in some sort of way, humbles sinners, even though they are never converted. The word is not to be preached with this in mind, but it will have this effect no less.

Therefore, let the word be preached and the sins of men will be rebuked. Lust will be restrained, and sin will be opposed, although these are not the results we seek.

Ans. 3. Even though killing sin is the work of the word and the Spirit, and even though it is good in itself, it is not available to those who still suffer from bitterness, and who remain under the power of darkness. It will not lead to their salvation.

Ans. 4. Let men know it is their duty, but only in its proper place. I do not remove men from mortification unless I intend to convert them. Someone who stops a man from mending a hole in his wall, to put out a fire that is consuming his whole house, is not that man's enemy. You poor fool! It is not a sore finger but a raging fever that you need to worry about. You set yourself against a particular sin, but do not realize that you are nothing but sin.

Let me add this for preachers of the word, or those who aspire to that profession by the good hand of God. It is their duty to plead with men about their sins, and to weigh into particular sins. But always remember that it is to be done with the proper goal of both law and gospel. That is, in so doing, their intent must be to reveal the sinner's true condition. Otherwise, by accident, they may drive men into mere formality or hypocrisy. Little of the purpose of preaching the gospel will be served by that. It does not help to beat a man out of drunkenness only to drive him into sober formality.

A skillful preacher strikes at the root with his axe, and he strikes at the heart. It is a good work to angrily attack the particular sins of ignorant and unregenerate persons, which the world is full of. We can do that with great efficacy, vigor, and success. However, if that leads them to painstaking put away only the sins that were preached about, then we may have beaten the enemy in the field, but we have driven them into an impregnable stronghold beyond our reach. You do not gain anything by picking on a single sin. You have nothing to hold the sinner by. Instead, get to the point of his sinful condition. Drive the argument to its source, and then deal with him there. Breaking men of particular sins, without breaking their hearts, denies us the advantage in dealing with them.

And here is where the Roman mortification is seriously in error. They drive all sorts of people to mortification, without considering whether they have a principle for doing that or not. They are so intent on having men mortify their lusts, that they call men to mortification instead of calling them to believing. The truth is, they do not know what it means to believe, or what mortification is used for. Faith for them is just a general assent to the doctrine taught in their church. Mortification is when a man takes a vow to seek a certain course of life, to deny himself some of the things of this world at a cost. Such men do not know either the Scriptures or the power of God. When they boast of their mortification, they are really celebrating their shame.

Some ethicists among ourselves also overlook the necessity of regeneration. They direct people who complain of a sin or lust, to vow against it for a month or so. They have no clue as to the mystery of the gospel, much like Nicodemus when he came first to Christ. They ask men to abstain from their sin for awhile. This usually makes their lust stronger. Maybe with a struggle they keep their word; maybe not. This only increases their guilt and torment. Does this mortify their sin at all? Do they conquer it? Is their condition changed if they manage to relinquish the sin? Do they not still suffer from bitterness? Is this not tantamount to making brick without straw, or worse, without strength? What promise has been made to any unregenerate man to justify doing this work? What assistance can he expect for performing it? Can sin be killed without an interest in the death of Christ, or mortified without the Spirit?

If such directions succeed in changing men's lives, which they seldom do, they never reach the point of changing their hearts or conditions. It may make them self-justified or hypocrites, but

not Christians. It often grieves me to see people with a zeal for God and a desire for eternal happiness, kept under a hard, burdensome, external worship and service of God by such directions. They toil all their days with these deceptive efforts to mortify their sins, oblivious to the righteousness of Christ, and unacquainted with his Spirit. I know too many of them. If God ever shines into their hearts, giving them the knowledge of his glory in the face of his Son Jesus Christ, then they will see the folly of their present way of life.

CHAPTER 8

UNIVERSAL SINCERITY NEEDED

- The second general rule proposed
- Unless we mortify every lust, no single lust will be mortified
- Partial mortification always comes from a corrupt motive
- Troubling temptation from a lust is often a punishment for other oversights.

The second general rule I propose is this:

2. The 2nd general rule: Strive to mortify ALL lusts, or fail to mortify ANY lust.

(See Chapter 7 for the 1st general rule).

Without being sincere and diligent to mortify all our lusts, we cannot mortify a single lust. The other general rule referred to the person; this rule applies to the sin itself. Let me explain.

Any lust can put a man in the condition described earlier. It is powerful, strong, and severe. It leads him captive, troubles him, disturbs him, and takes away his peace. He cannot bear it, and so he sets himself against it. He prays against it, groans under it, and sighs to be delivered from it. But in the meantime, perhaps, in his other duties, in his constant communion with God, in his reading, prayer, and meditation, or in other ways that are unrelated to the lust that troubles him, he becomes lax and negligent. He should not expect to mortify the lust that bothers him. This is the condition that often plagues men in their pilgrimage.

The Israelites, aware of their sin, sought God with diligence and earnestness, with fasting and prayer. They profess their earnestness repeatedly. "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways; they ask me for the laws of justice; they take delight in approaching God."[115] But God rejects it all. Their fasting is a remedy that will not heal them. The reason given in verses 5-7 is that they were selective in this duty. They attended diligently to that one, but they were negligent and careless in their other duties. Let us say someone contracts a "running sore" through indulgence and bad diet. If the underlying general condition of his body is diseased, then any effort he makes to cure his sore will be in vain. It will not matter how diligently and skillfully he treats the sore itself. It is no different if he tries to stop the bloody issue of sin and filth in his soul. He must be equally careful of his overall spiritual condition. That is because,

(1.) This kind of selective mortification is the result of a corrupt motive.

It can never have good results. The correct and acceptable principles of mortification will be emphasized from here on. It is hating sin as sin, not just as a painful or disturbing habit, and comprehending the love of Christ as revealed in the cross, that lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification. It is obvious that the selective mortification I speak of is spawned by self-love. You resolve with all diligence and earnestness to mortify a particular lust or sin. What is the reason? It bothers you. It has robbed you of your peace. It fills your heart with sorrow, trouble, and fear. You have no rest because of it. Friend, I suspect you have neglected prayer or reading. You have been conceited and loose in your conversation, or involved in things different than the lust that bothers you. These are no less sinful, and no less evil, than the one causing you pain. Jesus Christ bled for those too. Why not set yourself against them as well?

If you hate sin as sin, and every evil way that grieves and disturbs your soul, then you should be just as watchful against everything that grieves and disturbs the Spirit of God. It is obvious that you struggle against sin merely because of the trouble it causes you. If your conscience was quiet about it, you would let it alone. If it did not bother you, you wouldn't bother it. Now, do you really think God will put up with such hypocritical endeavors? Do you not think his Spirit will testify to the treachery and falsehood of your spirit? Do you think he will relieve you of what bothers you, so you will be free to pursue something else that grieves him just as much? No, says God. "If he could be rid of this lust, I would never hear from him again. Let him wrestle with it, or he will be lost."

No one should think to do his own work if he will not do God's work. God's work consists in universal obedience. To be freed of the present problem is our own work. That is why the apostle writes, "Cleanse yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."[116] If we will do anything, we must do all things. So then, what is acceptable to God is not only an intense opposition to this or that specific lust, but a universally humble frame of heart. We are to be watchful over every evil, and perform every duty.

(2.) God may be using the persistent lust that troubles you to strengthen you.

How do you know that God has not put up with the lust that troubles you in order to strengthen you, gain power over you, and punish you for your other oversights, and for your usual lukewarm walk with him? At least it has awakened you to consider your ways, to be more thorough in the work, and to change the way you walk with him.

Reasons for the predominance of a particular lust.

The rage and predominance of a particular lust is usually the result of a careless, negligent course in general, and that is for two reasons:

(1.) As its natural effect

Lust, as I showed in general, lies in the heart of everyone while he lives, even the best of us. Do not think the Scripture is just so many words when it says that sin is subtle, cunning, and crafty, that it seduces and entices us, fights and rebels against us. The heart is the source and the fountain from which flow all the issues of life and death. As long as a man keeps diligent watch over his heart, lust withers and dies in it. But if it breaks its restraints through negligence, it may gain passage to our thoughts through previously suppressed desires. And by these thoughts, perhaps it breaks out into open sin in our life. Its strength is applied to the way out that it has found. It continues to press for release by that same way until it gains open passage. It then annoys and torments us, and will not be easily restrained. This is how a man ends up wrestling with a lust in sorrow all his life that might easily have been prevented by a strict and universal watch.

(2.) As punishment for other sins

As I said, God often endures a sin to punish our other oversights. With wicked men, he gives them over to one as the judgment for another, a greater for the punishment of a lesser. He substitutes one that will hold them more securely for one from which they might have escaped.[117] So too with his own people, he may leave them with some irksome compulsion to prevent or cure some other evil. That was the case when the messenger of Satan was let loose on Paul so that he "might not be made haughty through extraordinary spiritual

revelations."[118] Was it not punishment for Peter's smug confidence that he was left to deny his Master?

It may be that God often allows this common state of lust to continue. He does so at least to admonish us, maybe to humble us, and perhaps to chasten and correct us for our generally loose and careless walk. If so, is it conceivable that the effect would be removed while the cause continued? That is, could the particular lust be mortified while the general condition remained unreformed? Doubtful. If someone really, thoroughly, and acceptably mortified a disturbing lust, he had better take care to be equally diligent in all aspects of his obedience. He must know that every lust, every omission of duty, is as burdensome to God as it is to him.[119] When disloyalty continues in the heart by indulging negligence, and not pressing for universal and perfect obedience, the soul becomes weak. It is not giving faith its whole effort, and so it becomes selfish. It is concerned more with the trouble of sin than the filth and guilt of it. The soul in such a state constantly provokes God. It should not expect a comfortable resolution to a single spiritual duty it undertakes, much less this universal duty under consideration. To accomplish that would require a wholly different attitude.

CHAPTER 9

SYMPTOMS OF A PARTICULAR LUST

Particular directions considering these dangerous symptoms of any lust:

- It is long-standing and deep-rooted
- Peace can still be obtained under it; several ways that is done
- It is frequently successful in its seductions
- The soul fights against it with arguments only taken from the event of it
- It is probable that rehabilitation is at work
- It withstands dealings from God – The state of those in whom these lusts are found.

III. Particular directions for dealing with a disturbing lust

Now that I have proposed some general rules, there are particular directions to guide the soul when it discovers a disturbing lust or compulsion. Some of these are preparatory, and some contain the work itself. The following are the preparatory sort:

The FIRST direction: Consider which dangerous symptoms accompany your lust.

Examine your sin to see whether it has a deadly mark on it or not. If it has, extraordinary remedies are to be used; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it. You may ask, "What are these dangerous marks and symptoms that you mean, the desperate accomplices of an indwelling lust,?" Let me name some of them:

1. The sin is long-standing and deep-rooted.

By this, I mean the sin has been with you a long time, corrupting your heart. If you have allowed it to continue in power and acceptance for some time, without attempting to vigorously kill it, and heal the wounds it caused you, then your disease of the soul is dangerous. Have you permitted worldliness, ambition, or excessive study to push aside the other duties you need to maintain your constant communion with God, and done so for an extended period? Have you let immorality defile your heart with pointless, foolish, and wicked fantasies for a number of days? Then your lust has a dangerous symptom. This was the case with David: "My wounds stink and are infected because of my foolishness."[120]

When a lust has remained in the heart for long time, corrupting, festering, and infecting it, then it will put the soul in a sorry state. In these cases, an ordinary course of humiliation will not do the job. Whatever the lust may be, it will infect all the faculties of the soul. It will accustom your feelings to its presence and its values. It will become so familiar to the mind and conscience that neither one startles at it. They will become brazen, treating it like something they want. Indeed, it will often assert itself without any notice being taken at all.

This seems to have been what happened with Joseph swearing by the life of Pharaoh.[121] Unless some extraordinary course is taken, a person afflicted this way has no reason in the world to expect the outcome will be peace. First, how will he be able to distinguish between a long-term unmortified lust, and the control or sovereignty of sin, which cannot happen to a believer? And second, how can he promise himself that it will ever be any different, or that his lust will stop tormenting and seducing him? This is especially true when the lust has been embedded and tolerated this way for so long, and in such variety.

It may be that the sin has alternated between leniency and torment. Those actions have been

so extraordinary, that the soul could not avoid taking notice. It may be that the lust has weathered many a storm, and been unaffected by a myriad of sermons and bible studies. Will it be easy to dislodge an inmate who claims squatter's rights? Lust is that kind of inmate if it has been allowed to remain unopposed. It will not be ejected easily. Old neglected wounds are always dangerous, and often fatal. Indwelling infections grow inflamed and stubborn when they are left unattended. If it is not killed daily, it will gather strength. Sin never dies on its own.

2. When the heart secretly pleas to approve and not oppose it.

If the lust has remained without a vigorous gospel attempt to mortify it, we have another dangerous symptom of a deadly disease in the heart. There are several ways this is evidenced:

(1.) When troubling thoughts about a sin arise, instead of seeking to destroy the sin, a man searches his heart to see what evidence he can find of his own goodness. He overlooks the sin and lust so that he can feel good about himself.

Now, gathering up the experiences of God, recalling them, collecting them, considering, trying, and enhancing them, are all excellent things to do. It is a duty practiced by all the saints. It is commended in both the Old and New Testaments. This was what David did when he "communed with his own heart," and called to mind the former loving-kindness of the Lord.[122] This is the duty Paul sets us to practice, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Christ is in you, unless you are lost?"[123] Not only is recalling excellent in itself, but it improves when it is employed in its proper season, such as a time of trial or temptation, or when the heart is troubled by sin. This is a picture frame of silver to set off this golden apple, as Solomon might put it.

But doing it to satisfy conscience, which cries out for quite another reason, is the desperate device of a heart in love with sin. When a man's conscience deals with him, when God rebukes him for the sin troubling his heart, he should be striving to get that sin pardoned in the blood of Christ, and mortified by his Spirit. Instead, he tries to relieve his guilt by throwing off the yoke that God has put on his neck. His condition is very dangerous. His wound is barely curable. When the convicting preaching of our Savior stung their consciences, the Jews supported themselves saying they were "Abraham's children." Because of that, they felt accepted by God; and so they approved of their own reprehensible wickedness to their utter ruin.

To some degree, this is a man blessing himself, saying that by one way or another he will have his peace, "although he adds drunkenness to thirst."[124] In point of fact, this attitude reveals a love of sin, and it cheapens the peace and love of God. Such a man plainly shows that if he can just keep up hope of escaping the "wrath to come,"[125] he is content to be unfruitful in the world. Any distance from God that is not final separation is fine with him. What is to be expected from such a heart?

(2.) This deceit is carried on by seeking grace and mercy for an unmortified sin, or for one that is not attempted to be mortified sincerely. This is the sign of a heart greatly entangled with the love of sin. A man's condition is sad when he has secret thoughts in his heart similar to those of Naaman concerning his worship in the house of Rimmon.[126] "In all other things I will walk with God, but in this thing, God be merciful to me." Resolving the issue by indulging in a sin with hopes of mercy, seems to be altogether inconsistent with Christian sincerity. It is the badge of a hypocrite, and "turns the grace of God into wantonness;"[127] Yet I do not doubt that through the craft of Satan and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be ensnared with this deceit of sin. That must be true, or Paul would

never have cautioned them against it as he did, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound?"[128] The flesh would have us believe that it should be indulged for the sake of grace! Sin stands ready to pervert every word that is spoken of mercy for its own corrupt purposes. To apply mercy to a sin that is not vigorously mortified, is to fulfill the perverted aims of the flesh under the guise of the gospel.

A deceitful heart will sometimes make use of these and other ways to approve its detestable acts. When a man secretly cherishes the sin in his heart, even if he is not consumed by it, and if he would practice that sin except for his fear of the consequences, then he is at the door of death. If he excuses it without mortifying it, and without seeking pardon for it in the blood of Christ, then that man's "wounds stink and are corrupt."[129] He is at the door of death. He must quickly seek pardon for it.

3. There is frequent success in sin's seduction.

If the sin seduces the soul frequently, and it obtains the general consent of the will to do it, then we have another dangerous symptom. This is that I mean: when the sin gets the consent of the will with some delight, even though it is not actually committed, it has succeeded. A man may not be able to outwardly "finish" the sin, as James puts it,[130] because of the circumstances. Yet, if the will to commit the sin was actually obtained, then I say it has succeeded.

Now, if a lust is able to get this far, it may be quite dangerous. The man is in a bad state, perhaps unregenerate. It depends on whether this consent is achieved by choice of will or by accident. In a way, an accident may still be chosen. If we are careless and negligent, where we are required to be careful and watchful, then that accident does not reduce the voluntary nature of what we do. Although men do not choose to be careless and negligent, if they choose a course of action that will make them so, then they choose the accident itself.[131] Let us not think that the evil of men's hearts is less because they seem to be surprised into the consent they give to it. It is negligence in their duty to watch over their hearts that betrays them into that surprise.

4. When a man fights against his sin only with legalistic arguments.

If a man opposes his sin only with arguments as to its consequences or punishment, it is a sign that sin has taken substantial possession of his will. There is an overflow of wickedness in his heart. A man whose only objection to the seduction of sin and lust in his heart is the fear of shame among men, or hell from God, would commit the sin if no shame or punishment were involved. How that would differ from living in the practice of sin, I do not know.

Those who are Christ's act in obedience to gospel principles. To oppose the seduction of sin in their lives and lust in their hearts, they have the death of Christ, the love of God, the repulsive nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, and a deep-grounded abhorrence of sin as sin. Joseph did so. "How shall I do this great evil," he says, "and sin against the LORD?" my good and gracious God.[132] And Paul writes, "The love of Christ constrains us;"[133] "Having received these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit."[134]

But if a man is so dominated by the power of his lust that he has nothing but the law to oppose it, then that sin possesses his will. If he cannot fight against it with gospel weapons, and deals with it entirely by hell and judgment (which are the proper arms of the law), then it is evident that sin has conquered his will and his affections, and to a very great extent. Such a person has rejected the conduct of renewing grace. He is kept from ruin only by restraining grace. He has fallen from grace and is now back under the power of the law. This must surely provoke Christ to anger. He has thrown off Christ's easy, gentle yoke and rule, and put on the iron yoke of the

law, just to indulge a lust.

Judge yourself by this: what do you say to your soul when sin forces you to make a stand? You must either serve the sin and rush into folly, like a horse into battle, or you must make headway against it to suppress it. How does the conversation go with yourself? Do you say, "The outcome of this will be Hell; vengeance will find me." If so, then it is time for you to look around; evil lies at your door.[135] To clearly demonstrate that sin shall not have control over believers, Paul's main argument is that they "are not under the law, but under grace."[136] If your battles with sin are all legalistic, what assurance do you have that sin will not control you and be your ruin?

You need to know that this preserve of the law will not hold out for long. If your lust has driven you from stronger gospel forts, then it will speedily overrun this one too. Do not assume that the law will deliver you when you have voluntarily surrendered to your enemy those helps and means of preservation that are a thousand times stronger. Unless you recover from this condition quickly, be assured that the thing you fear most will come upon you.[137] What gospel principles do not do, legal motives cannot do.

5. When it is probable that there is Godly rehabilitation involved through punishment.

This is another dangerous symptom. I have no doubt that God sometimes leaves even his own under the bewildering power of some lust or sin to correct them for their former sins, negligence, and folly. That was cause for the church to complain, "Why have you hardened us from the fear of your name?"[138] And no one questions that this is God's way of dealing with unregenerate men.

How do we know whether God's intervening hand has left us to the anguish of our own heart? Answer: examine your heart and ways. What was the condition of your soul before you became entangled in the sin that you complain of? Were you negligent in your Christian duties? Had you lived too much for yourself? Do you suffer from the guilt of an unrepented sin? A new sin may be permitted, as well as a new affliction sent, to bring an old sin to remembrance.

Have you received any outstanding mercy, protection, or pardon that you did not reciprocate, or for which you were ungrateful? Have you been suffering under a sin without laboring to put an end to it? Have you failed to use opportunities to glorify God in your generation that he graciously provided? Have you conformed yourself to the world and its men, succumbing to the numerous temptations of your day? If you find this has been your state, then awake! Call upon God! You are fast asleep in a storm of anger around you!

6. When your lust has already withstood particular dealings from God against it.

This condition is described in Isaiah, "Because of the evil of his greed, I burst out in anger and struck him. I hid myself and raged. And he walked on in the idolatrous way of his heart."[139] God dealt with them about their prevailing lust in several ways, by affliction and by desertion, but they held out against it all. This is a sad condition which nothing but sovereign grace can relieve (as God expresses it in the next verse), and which no man should take upon himself to cure.

In his caring way, God often meets with a man and speaks specifically to the evil of his heart. He did this with Joseph's brothers about selling him into Egypt. This makes the man reflect on his sin, and judge himself for it. God cloaks himself in the voice of the danger, affliction, trouble, or sickness that assaults him. Sometimes, reading the word of God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart, and shakes him about his present condition. More frequently, God meets with men through the preaching of the word, which is his great arsenal for conviction, conversion, and edification. God often cuts men by the sword of his word in that

arsenal, striking directly at their heart-loved lust. He startles the sinner, and motivates him to mortify and relinquish the evil of his heart. Now, if the hold that his lust has on him compels him to break these bonds of the Lord, if it can overcome these convictions and regain its old posture, and if it can close the wounds that his soul has received from God, then he is in a sad condition.

The evils that accompany such a frame of heart are unspeakable. Every warning that is given to a man who is in such a state is a precious mercy to him. How much those who reject these pleadings must despise God! And what infinite patience God must have not to cut him off, and swear in his wrath that this man shall never enter into his rest!

This evidence, and much more, exist of a lust that is dangerous, if not fatal. As our Savior said of the evil spirit, "This kind goes out only by prayer and fasting."[140] I say the same about lusts of this kind. An ordinary course of mortification will not do it; extraordinary ways must be focused on.

This is the first particular direction: Consider whether the lust or sin you are contending with is accompanied by any of the dangerous symptoms listed above.

Before I continue, let me give you one caution, for fear someone might be misled by what has been said. Although the things mentioned above may happen to true believers, just because someone encounters them, it does not mean he is a true believer. These are the evils that believers may fall into and be ensnared with, not the things that constitute a believer. A man may as well conclude that because David fell into adultery, and he is an adulterer himself, that he is a believer. It is like this argument: A wise man may be sick and wounded and do some foolish things; therefore, everyone who is sick and wounded and does foolish things is a wise man. It does not follow.

The seventh chapter of Romans contains the description of a regenerate man, a believer. If you need evidence of being a believer, it must come from the things that constitute a believer. Someone who evidences these things in himself, and yet is plagued by sin, may safely conclude that, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one."

CHAPTER 10

A SENSE OF THE GUILT OF SIN REQUIRED

- The guilt of the sin – Guidelines for help
- The multiple dangers involved -
  - Hardening
  - Temporal correction
  - Loss of peace and strength
  - Eternal destruction -- Rules to manage this consideration
- The evil of it –
  - In grieving the Spirit
  - Wounding the new creature
  - Taking away a man's usefulness.

The SECOND direction: Grasp the guilt, danger, and evil of your sin

Get a clear and lasting sense in your mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of the sin that troubles you –

1. Get a clear and lasting sense of the guilt of sin.

One of the deceits of a prevailing lust is to minimize its own guilt. "It is just a little one." "When I go and bow myself in the house of Rimmon, God be merciful to me in this thing."[141] We say to ourselves, "It is bad, but it is not as bad as some. Other Christians suffer from this one, and they sin far worse than this!" There are many ways through which sin diverts the mind from correctly understanding its guilt. Its foul vapors darken the mind so that its judgment is distorted. Confused reasoning, extenuating promises, raging desires, conditional relinquishment, hopes of mercy, all have their share in distracting the mind from considering the guilt of a prevailing lust. The prophet tells us that when a lust reaches its height, "Prostitution, wine, and new wine take away the heart."[142] That is, lust takes away our understanding, as "the heart" is often used in Scripture. It accomplishes this completely in unregenerate persons, and partially in regenerate ones.

Solomon speaks of someone enticed by a lewd woman. He says he was "among the foolish ones;" he was "a young man without understanding."[143] And what was his folly about? "As a bird to the snare, he did not know his life was at stake."[144] He did not consider the guilt of the evil he was involved in. And the Lord gives a reason why his dealings with Ephraim had the same effect: "Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart."[145] Ephraim had no understanding of his own miserable condition. The only way David could have remained ignorant for so long about the true extent of his atrocious sin, was because his reasoning was corrupted time and again. It hindered him from taking a clear view of its ugliness and guilt in the mirror of the law. This made it necessary to send the prophet to awaken him. He silenced all the subterfuges and pretenses by his parable, so that David might completely grasp the guilt of what he had done. This is the proper consequence of lust in the heart. It darkens the mind so that it cannot rightly judge its guilt. There are many other ways in which it extenuates itself that I will not go into.

Let this, then, be the first caution for someone who wants to mortify sin: rightly judge the guilt of

it in your mind. To help you in that regard, consider these:

(1.) Continuing sin in believers is worse than sin in unbelievers.

Although the power of sin is weakened by inherent grace in believers, and it does not have the same control over them that it has over others, the guilt of sin that still remains is intensified by that grace: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may grow? God forbid. How shall we who are dead to sin, live with it any longer?"[146] "How shall we, who are dead to sin?" The emphasis is on the word "we." How can we who have received grace from Christ for the opposite purpose, continue to do it? Doubtless, we are more evil than anyone else if we do. I will not go into the special aggravations of the sins of such people, or how they sin against more love, mercy, grace, assistance, relief, means, and pardon than others. But let this consideration stay in your mind: there is infinitely more evil and guilt in the sin that remains in your heart, than there would have been in that same sin if you had no grace at all.

(2.) Sin hidden in our heart is worse than sin evidenced by our acts.

God sees more abundant beauty and excellence in the desires of the heart of his servants, than he does in the most glorious works of others. He sees more beauty in the desires of their heart than he does in most of their own outward performances. So God sees a great deal of evil in the lust of their hearts, in fact, more than he sees in the open, notorious acts of wicked men, or in the many outward sins that the saints may fall into. There is more opposition to those outward acts than to their inward lust, and more humiliation generally follows them. Thus, in dealing with his decaying children, Christ goes to the heart of the matter with them. He lays aside their profession of faith: "I know you. You are something different than what you profess, and this makes you repulsive. I will spit you out of my mouth."[147]

So, then, let these and similar things lead you to a clear sense of the guilt of your indwelling lust. There should be no room in your heart for thoughts that extenuate or excuse it, through which sin, unfelt, gains strength and prevails.

2. Consider the multiple dangers of continuing to sin:

(1.) The danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

This is what the apostle strongly instructs, "Pay attention brothers, so that none of you has an evil heart of unbelief that revolts against the living God. Instead, exhort one another each day, or you will be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."[148] He is saying, "Pay attention! Use all means; consider your temptations; watch diligently. There is a treachery, a deceit in sin, that tends to harden your hearts against the fear of God." The hardening mentioned here is absolute and complete insensitivity to wrongdoing. Sin tends to do that. Every compulsion and lust will make at least some progress towards it. Those of you who were tender, who melted under the word and under trials, will grow "sermon-proof and nausea-proof." Those of you who trembled at the presence of God, at thoughts of death and your appearance before him, will have such brazenness in your spirit that you will no longer be moved by these things. Your soul and your sin will be spoken about, and you will not care, hear, or notice. You will be able to pass over your Christian duties like praying, hearing, and reading, and your heart will not be affected in the least. Sin will become easy for you. You will ignore it as nothing. This is what it will grow to be.

And what will be the result of such a condition? Can a sadder thing happen to you? It is enough to make the heart tremble, to think of getting to a point in life when thoughts of sin are inconsequential, when thoughts of grace, mercy, and the blood of Christ, of the law, heaven, and hell, leave little impression on us. Take care, this is what your lust is working towards:

hardening the heart, searing the conscience, blinding the mind, dulling the senses, and deceiving the whole soul.

(2.) The danger of receiving serious correction in this life.

The Scripture calls these corrections "vengeance, judgment, and punishment."[149] Though God would not completely cut you off for this abhorrent lust in your heart, he will nonetheless visit you with the rod. Even though he may pardon and forgive, he will still take vengeance on your methods. Remember David and all his troubles! Look at him fleeing to the wilderness, and consider the hand of God on him. Does it mean nothing to you that God might kill your child in anger, ruin your home in anger, break your bones in anger, allow you to be a scandal in anger, kill you, destroy you, lead you into darkness, all in anger? Is it nothing that he would punish, ruin, and cause the downfall of others for your sake? Do not misunderstand. I do not mean that God does in fact send all these things every time he gets angry. God forbid! But I do say that when he does deal with you in this way, and your conscience bears witness with him that you provoked this response, you will find his dealings with you full of bitterness to your soul. If you do not fear these things, then I fear you are hardened.

(3.) The danger of losing of peace and strength all your life.

The promises of the covenant of grace can be summed up in these two things: to have peace with God, and to have the strength to walk before him. In these are found the life of our souls. If we do not have them to some comfortable degree, then to live is to die. What good is life if we cannot see the face of God in peace, or if we do not have the strength to walk with him? An unmortified lust will certainly deprive us of these things. This is so evident in David; nothing can be clearer. How often does he complain that his bones are broken, his soul tormented, and his wounds made painful because of his sin? Take other instances: "Because of the evil of his greed, I burst out in anger and struck him. I hid myself in rage."[150] I ask you, what peace is there for your soul while God hides himself, or strength while he strikes you? "I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offense and seek my face;"[151] "I will leave them, hide my face." And what will become of their peace and strength when God does that?

If you ever enjoyed peace with God, if his terrors ever made you afraid, if you ever had strength to walk with him, mourned in your prayer, or were ever troubled because of your weakness, then think of this danger that hangs over your head. It may only be a short time before you see the face of God in peace no more. Perhaps by tomorrow you will not be able to pray, read, hear, or perform any of your Christian duties with the least bit of cheerfulness, life, or vitality. And it may be possible that you will never see another quiet hour while you live. You may carry around broken bones, full of pain and terror, all the days of your life. Perhaps God will shoot his arrows at you, and fill you with anguish and torment, fears and bewilderment. He may make you a terror and a shock to yourself and others, or show you hell and fury every moment. He may frighten you with anticipation of his hatred so bad that the sores of your sin will open and seep, and your soul will refuse to be comforted. You will wish for death rather than life. Consider this a little. Although God would not utterly destroy you, he might just throw you into this condition where you will have immediate and living visions of your destruction. Move your heart to think of this. Let your heart know what it is like to be the product of its sinfulness. Do not leave this imagery until you have made your soul tremble within you.

(4.) The danger of eternal destruction.

To properly manage this consideration, take note,

[1.] That there is a connection between continuing in sin and eternal destruction. Though God does keep some from continuing in their sin so they will not be destroyed, he pardons

no one from destruction that does continue in sin. Because this is true, while anyone is under the abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God must be presented to him. Hence we are cautioned not to harden our hearts and depart from God.[152] We are admonished that if God's people draw back from living by faith, God will not be pleased with them.[153] This is the rule for God's course of action: If any man "departs" from him, that is, "draws back" through unbelief, then "God's soul takes no pleasure in him." That is, his indignation will pursue that man to destruction. That is evident in this passage addressed to believers, "For he that sows into his flesh will reap ruin from the flesh; but he that sows into the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit."[154]

[2.] Someone who is so entangled and dominated by the power of a lust, as described above, has no clear proof that he is a child of the covenant; and therefore he has no shelter from the fear of destruction. So he is right to fear destruction from the Lord, and he ought to look at it as the definite outcome of his course and ways. You may argue, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."[155] That is true, but who has the comfort of this assertion? Who may assume to be in Christ Jesus? "Those that walk after the Spirit, and not after the flesh." You may ask, "Does this not persuade men to unbelief, and to doubt their salvation?" I answer, No.

There are two judgments that a man may make about himself. The first is about his person, and the second, about his ways. It is the judgment of his ways, not his person, that I am speaking about. He should get the best evidence about his person that he can. But it is his duty to judge whether an evil way will end in destruction; not to do that is atheism. I am not saying that when a man is so dominated, he ought to throw away the evidence he has of his personal interest in Christ. But I am saying that he cannot simply store it away in an attic as a thing of the past.

There are a two condemnations a man may consider about himself. First, he may consider his punishment, when he concludes that he deserves to be cast out of the presence of God. This is so far from unbelief that, in effect, it is faith. Second, he may consider the proclamation and event of his condemnation, when he concludes that he will be damned. I am not saying it is anyone's duty to condemn himself, nor am I calling anyone to do that. But I do say that a man ought to consider that the outcome of his ways will be death, so that he may be provoked to fly from it. This is something else that a man should dwell on if he desires to be freed from the entanglement of his lusts.

3. Consider the evils of continuing to sin;

By this I mean its present evils. Danger refers to what is to come; evil refers to what is present. Some of the many evils that attend an unmortified lust follow below:

(1.) It grieves the holy and blessed Spirit.

The Spirit is given to believers to dwell in them and persevere with them. After discouraging the Ephesians from many lusts and sins, the apostle gives this as the primary motive. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, through which you are sealed for the day of redemption."[156] He is saying, "Do not grieve that Spirit of God through which you receive so many and such wonderful benefits." He specifies a remarkable and comprehensive one, "sealing to the day of redemption." The Spirit is grieved by the sin. As a tender and loving friend is grieved at the unkindness of a man he has served well, so is it with this tender and loving Spirit. He has chosen our hearts for a place to dwell, and there he does all that our souls desire for us. He is grieved when we harbor his enemies beside him in our hearts, those he is charged to destroy.

"He does not willingly depress or cause grief."[157] Why should we daily grieve him? Sometimes he is said to be "annoyed," sometimes "grieved in his heart," to express the strongest sense of our provocation.

Now, if there is anything left of gracious imagination in the soul, if it is not completely hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, considering this will certainly affect it. Consider who and what you are, who the Spirit is that is grieved, and what he has done for you. Consider why he has come to your soul, and what he has already done in you. And then be ashamed. Among those who walk with God, there is no greater incentive to universal holiness than this: to know that the blessed Spirit who dwells in them as temples of God, preserves them fit for himself. He continually considers what they entertain in their hearts, and he rejoices when his temple is kept undefiled. The aggravation of the sin of Zimri was that he brought his adulteress into the congregation in the sight of Moses and the rest, who were weeping for the sins of the people.[158] Is it not a similar aggravation to approve of a lust, or to allow it to remain in your heart, when it is entertained in the sight of the Holy Ghost who is taking care to preserve his tabernacle as a pure and holy place?

(2.) The Lord Jesus Christ is wounded again by it.

His new creature in the heart is wounded; his love is foiled; his adversary is gratified. Relinquishing Christ completely, by the deceitfulness of sin, is like "crucifying him again, and putting him to open shame."[159] In the same way, each time we harbor the sin that he came to destroy, we wound and grieve him.

(3.) It will take away a man's usefulness in his generation.

If he continues to sin, then his works, endeavors, and labors will seldom receive blessing from God. If he is a preacher, God blows like a billows on his ministry, so that he labors in the fire.[160] He is not honored with any success, nor is he honored for doing any work for God. The world today is full of poor, withering professors of Christ. How few walk in any beauty or glory! How barren, how useless they are! Among the many reasons for this sad state of affairs is that many men harbor spirit-devouring lusts in their hearts. They are like worms at the root of their obedience, eating away at it, weakening it day by day. All graces, all the ways and means by which any graces might be exercised and improved, are compromised by this consuming lust. And as to success, God blasts the labor of such men.

This, then, is my second direction. Oppose lust which has taken up habitual residence in your soul. Keep alive in your heart the considerations of its guilt, danger, and evil. Meditate often on these things. Make your heart dwell on them. Engage your mind to consider them. Do not let your thoughts wander from this until they begin to have a powerful influence on your soul, and make it tremble.

CHAPTER 11

FIVE MORE DIRECTIONS FOR DEALING WITH SIN

- The THIRD direction: Load your conscience with the guilt of the troubling cancer of sin
- The FOURTH direction: Vehemently desire rescue from it
- The FIFTH: Considerations of some compulsions rooted deeply in men's natural state
- The SIXTH direction: Occasions and opportunities to prevent sin
- The SEVENTH direction: Vigorously oppose the first actions of sin.

The THIRD direction: Load your conscience with the guilt of your sin.

Do not just consider yourself guilty generally. Instead, load your conscience with the guilt of sin's actual outbursts and disruptions. To help understand how to apply this rule, let me give some specific directions. Use God's method in dealing with it:

1. Begin with generalities:

(1.) Consider the guilt that arises from the holiness of the law.

Charge your conscience with the guilt arising from the moral correctness and holiness of the law. Apply the holy law of God to your conscience; compare your immorality to it, and then pray that you may be affected by it. Consider its holiness, spirituality, fiery severity, essence, and complete authority. Then see whether you can stand before it. Do not hold back in impressing your conscience with the terror of the Lord that is in the law, and how righteous it is that every one of your transgressions receives its just reward. Perhaps your conscience will invent diversions and evasions to keep you from this powerful consideration. For example, it might respond that the condemning power of the law does not apply to you, that you are set free from it, and so on. Though it is true that you are not subject to the law, you need not be persuaded by such an argument:

[1.] Tell your conscience that it cannot produce any evidence that you are free from the condemning power of sin as long as your unmortified lust remains in your heart. It may be that the law can make good its claim against you, that you remain under its full control. If it can, then by definition you are a lost creature. For that reason, it is best to consider the worst case, and thoroughly ponder the ramifications of the law as if you were lost. To be sure, anyone who secretly argues in his heart that he is freed from the law as a way to justify holding onto a sin or lust, cannot produce any reasonable evidence, on gospel grounds, that he is indeed freed from sin. He merely pretends to be delivered from it.

[2.] Whether or not you are subject to the law, the law has a commission from God to seize transgressors wherever it finds them. It is to bring them before his throne to plead for themselves. This is your present situation. The law has found you out, and it will bring you before God. If you can plead for a pardon, well and good. If not, the law will do its work of condemning you.

[3.] Say to your conscience, "this is the proper work of the law, to discover the guilt of sin." It is to awaken and humble the soul for that sin, and to be a mirror to reflect sin in its true colors. If you refuse to deal with it because the law is doing its job, that does not come from faith. It comes from the hardness of your heart and the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a door through which too many professors of Christ have exited to preach open apostasy. They pretend that if they have been delivered from the law, and no longer need to consult it for guidance and direction, then they no longer have to measure their sin by it. Little by little this notion has influenced their practical understanding of sin. Having taken root there, it has turned loose the will and affections to pursue all manner of detestable longings.

By using ways such as these, persuade your conscience to listen intently to what the law says to you about your lust and immorality. It speaks in the name of the Lord. If your ears are open, it will speak with a voice that will make you tremble, that will knock you to the ground, and fill you with astonishment. To mortify your immorality, you must tie your conscience to the law. You must exclude all shifts and exceptions, until your conscience owns its guilt with a clear and thorough understanding. To that end, David says your "iniquity must always be in front of you."[161]

(2.) Consider Christ whom you have pierced.

Bring your lust to the gospel, not for relief, but for further conviction of its guilt. Look on Christ whom you have pierced, and be bitter. Say to your soul, "What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on? Is this how I respond to the Father for his love, to the Son for his blood, and to the Holy Ghost for his grace? Is this how I repay the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, and that the blessed Spirit has chosen to dwell in? And can I keep myself out of the dust? What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How can I hold up my head with any courage before him? Do I consider communion with him of so little value that, for the sake of this vile lust, I have left little room for him in my heart? How will I escape judgement if I neglect salvation in this way?

In the meantime, what do I say to the Lord? Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation; I have despised them all, and treated them as worthless, just so I could harbor a lust in my heart. Can I imagine God's fatherly features before me so that I can provoke him to his face? Was my soul washed only to make room for this new depravity? Why would I try to frustrate the purpose of Christ's death? Why would I daily grieve the Spirit through whom I am sealed until the day of redemption?" Entertain your conscience daily with this treatment. See if it can withstand this aggravation of its guilt. If it does not sink a little and melt, then I am afraid that your case is a dangerous one.

2. Descend to particulars.

We considered all the benefits of grace under the general topic of the gospel, such as redemption, justification, etc. Now consider the love that grace conveys to you personally, and how the benefits aggravate the guilt of your own immorality.

(1.) Consider the infinite patience and tolerance of God towards you personally.

Consider the opportunities he might have taken over a period of time to make you ashamed and reproached in this world, and an object of His wrath forever. Think about how you dealt treacherously and falsely with him from time to time, flattered him with your lips, but broke all your promises and obligations through the sin you now pursue. And yet he has spared you time and again, despite the brazen way you put Him to the test to see how long he would hold off punishing you. And yet, will you still sin against him? Will you continue to weary him, and make him put up with your immorality?

Have you not often concluded that it was completely impossible for him to bear with you any longer? Have you felt that he would cut you off and be gracious no more, that all his tolerance was exhausted, and hell and wrath was already prepared for you? And yet, beyond all your

expectations, he has returned with ministrations of love. Will you even now continue with this provocation in his glorious sight?

(2.) Consider how often you have been restored by God's grace.

How often have you nearly been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and then, by the infinite and rich grace of God, been restored to communion with him again? Have you not found grace decaying, your delight in duties, practices, prayer and meditation vanishing, and your tendency to walk carelessly thriving? Have you not found yourself engaged with delight in the kind of behavior, in the kind of places, and with the kind of people that God abhors? Why would you travel any more to the brink of hardness?

(3.) Consider all of God's gracious dealings with you.

All of God's gracious dealings with you, all of his divine exemptions, pardons, trials, mercies, and enjoyments should be considered here. Load your conscience with these and similar considerations. Do not leave it alone until it is thoroughly moved with the guilt of your indwelling sinfulness, until it feels its wound, and lies in the dust before the Lord. Unless this is done purposefully, all other efforts to ruthlessly remove it will be of no avail. While the conscience has any means to alleviate the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt to mortify it.

The FOURTH direction: get a constant longing to be delivered from its power.

After being moved by your sin in this way, you need to get a constant longing, a panting to be delivered from its power. Do not let your heart be content for one moment with your present condition. Longing for anything in the physical realm has value only if it incites a person to diligently pursue what is desired. In spiritual things it works differently. Longing, breathing, and panting for deliverance is a grace in itself. It has a mighty power to conform the soul to the likeness of the thing longed for. The apostle, in describing the repentance and godly sorrow of the Corinthians, counts this "vehement desire" as an eminent grace at work in them.[162] In the case of indwelling sin and its power, how does Paul describe his frame of mind? His heart bursts with the most passionate expressions of his desire for relief, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"[163]

My goodness! If this were the attitude of the saints when they considered indwelling sin, they would be far more committed to its extermination, especially if we added the rage and power stimulated by a specific lust! Unless you long for deliverance, be assured that you will not have it. This will make the heart use every opportunity to gain an advantage over its enemy. It will be ready to use any help provided for sin's destruction. Strong desires are the lifeblood of "praying always," which we are commanded to do in all situations.[164] In no situation is it more necessary than this. Strong desires set faith and hope to work, and they are the soul moving after the Lord.

So get your heart into a panting and breathing frame of mind. Long, sigh, cry out! You know the example of David. I do not need to say any more.

The FIFTH direction: Consider if the sin is rooted in your natural disposition.

Consider whether the disease that afflicts you is rooted in your nature, whether it is cherished, encouraged, and strengthened because of your natural make-up. The natural disposition of

some men makes them prone to particular sins. If that is possible in your case, then consider,

1. This does not minimize the guilt of your sin in the least.

Some people, with open irreverence, blame the enormity of their sinfulness on their disposition. Whether others relieve the pressing guilt of their sickness with the same excuse, I do not know. It is from the fall, from the original depravity of our natures, that the growth and nourishment of any sin remains as part of our natural state. David figured that because he was shaped and conceived in sin[165] it aggravated his subsequent sin, but it certainly did not lessen or excuse the guilt of it. The fact that you have a special fondness for a particular sin is only an expression of the original lust in your nature. It should pointedly degrade and humble you rather than absolve your inclinations.

2. You must focus more because Satan has an advantage over you.

In reference to your walk with God, you have to focus all the more, because sin and Satan have a great advantage over by your natural disposition. Without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence, they will certainly prevail against your soul. Thousands have been hurried headlong into hell because of this natural inclination. Without it they might have gone at a more gentle, less provoking, and less harmful rate…[166]

3. Force your body into submission.

Having described how to mortify a sickness that is strongly rooted in someone's nature, there is one method uniquely suited to the task. This one is advocated by the apostle. "I stay on my body to subdue it."[167] Bringing the body into subjection is an ordinance of God designed to mortify sin. This checks the natural source of the sickness. It weakens it by taking away its fertile soil. However, the Roman Catholics have placed the whole emphasis of mortification on voluntary services and penance. This does lead to the subjection of the body, but there is a temptation for some to neglect the means of humiliation that God has appointed. Bringing the body into subjection by cutting short its natural appetite, by fasting, watching, and similar denials, is doubtless acceptable to God. Yet it ought to be done with these limitations:

(I.) Outwardly weakening and impairing the body should not be seen as an end in itself; that would bring us under the law again. It is only a means to an end, which is to weaken sin at its natural root. A man may be lean in both body and soul.

(2.) The means by which this is done, namely, by fasting, watching, and the like, should not be considered effective in themselves. They cannot truly mortify a sin of their own power. If they could, sin might be mortified without any help from the Spirit. They are to be seen only as ways through which the Spirit may, and sometimes does, instill strength in us to accomplish his own work. Failure to correctly understand and apply these and similar considerations, has created a rite of mortification among the Roman Catholics that might better be applied to horses and beasts than to believers.

To summarize, when the corruption complained of seems to be rooted in the natural disposition of a man, an effort must be made to constrain the natural root of that corruption. We have escaped the corruption of the world. We must now apply our souls to participate in the blood and spirit of Christ.[168]

The SIXTH direction: Guard against the occasions and opportunities of your sin.

Consider the occasions and opportunities your disease takes to assert itself. Then guard against them all. This is one part of the duty that our blessed Savior recommends to his disciples named watching: "I say to you all, Watch."[169] In another place, "Pay attention, or your hearts may be overburdened."[170] Watch against all outbursts of your immorality. I am referring to the duty which David claimed to exercise: "I have kept myself from my wickedness."[171] He watched all the ways his sinfulness worked, both to block them and to oppose them. This is what we are called to do under the name of "considering our ways."[172] Consider which ways, companions, opportunities, studies, business, and conditions, have usually (or at any time) provided opportunities for your disease to assert itself? Then attentively set yourself against all of them.

Men do this with respect to their physical infirmities and diseases. They avoid the seasons, diet, and air that have proved offensive. Things of the soul are no less important. You need to know that anyone who dares to dally with the occasions of sin, will dare to sin. Anyone who dares to be tempted to wickedness, will dare to be wicked. Hazael thought he would not be as wicked as the prophet told him he would be. To convince him, all the prophet needed to say was, "You will be king of Syria."[173] If he risks the temptation to be cruel, he will be cruel. If you tell someone that he will commit such and such sins, he will startle at it. But if you convince him that he will have opportunities to commit them, and be tempted in specific ways, on specific occasions, then he will have little ground left for his confidence. There are many facets to this topic that I will not go into here. But because this topic is no less important than the whole doctrine handled here, I have addressed it at large in another treatise.

The SEVENTH direction: React swiftly against the first signs of your sin.

React swiftly and powerfully against the first indications of your disease, at its initial conception. Do not let it gain the least bit of ground. Do not say, "This far and no farther." If you allow it one step, it will take another. It is impossible to fix bounds for sin. It is like water in a channel. If it breaks out, it will take its course. It is easier to contain if inactive than turbulent. James describes the gradation and progress of lust, so that we may stop at its entrance.[174] Do you find your corruption beginning to entangle your thoughts? Rise up against it at that point with all your strength. Be no less indignant than if it had fully accomplished what it aims to do. Consider what an unclean thought would have you do: it would have you roll yourself in folly and filth. Ask envy what it would have you do: it would have you murder and destroy as the result of it. Set yourself against it with no less vigor than if it had completely debased you in wickedness. If you do not, you will not prevail. As sin gains ground on our affections, making them delight in itself, it also gains ground on our understanding, making it overlook such sin.

CHAPTER 12

SELF-ABASEMENT BEFORE THE MAJESTY OF GOD

- Think about the excellence and majesty of God
- Consider your unfamiliarity with him
- Meditate constantly in a way that leads to a proper sense of shame, and an appreciation of your own vileness.

The EIGHTH direction: Consider the majesty of God and how little you know of Him.

1. Think about the greatness of God, and who you are by comparison.

Be thoughtful about the excellence and majesty of God and your infinite, inconceivable distance from him. It will not be long before you are filled with a sense of your own vileness. This realization will strike deep at the root of any indwelling sin. When Job clearly discovers the greatness and excellence of God, he is filled with self-abhorrence; he is pressed to humiliation.[175] And when Habakkuk grasps the majesty of God, he affirms the state he is in: "When I heard, my stomach turned; my lips quivered at the voice: decay entered my bones and I trembled, hoping I might be left alone in the day of trouble."[176]. "With God there is terrible majesty,"[177] says Job. For this reason, those in the Old Testament thought that when they had seen God, they would die. The Scripture is filled with this self-humiliation. When compared to God, it describes men as "grasshoppers," "worthless," the "powder left on the scales after weighing the mountains."[178] Maintain this train of thought to degrade the pride of your heart, and to keep your soul humble within you. There is nothing better to insulate you from the deceits of sin than this frame of heart. Ponder extensively the greatness of God.

2. Think about how unfamiliar you are with him.

Though you know enough to keep you low and humble, that is such a small part of knowing him! Contemplating his own ignorance is what threw Solomon into such a fearful understanding of God. "Surely I am as stupid as a cow, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor do I know holiness. What man has mounted the skies, or climbed down from them? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has enclosed the seas in a mantle? Who has defined the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if you can tell me?"[179] Wrestle with this to knock down the pride of your heart. What do you know of God? How little it is! How immense God is in his nature! Can you look without terror into the abyss of eternity? You cannot bear the light of his glorious being. Because I consider this very useful in our walk with God, I will continue emphasizing it. I want it to leave a lasting impression on those who desire to walk humbly with God. Keep in mind, it must be offset with that brotherly boldness we have been given in Jesus Christ to approach the throne of grace.

Consider, then, keeping your heart in continual awe of the majesty of God. Appreciate the fact that people of extraordinary accomplishment, those who know the most about communion with God, still know very little of him, and very little of his glory while they are in this life. God reveals his name to Moses, and reveals the most glorious qualities of the covenant of grace.[180] Yet all of these are only the "back" of God.[181] All that Moses knows is miniscule compared to the

perfection of God's glory. For this reason, with specific reference to Moses and in contrast to Christ, it is said, "No man has ever seen God,"[182] not even Moses, the most eminent among us. We speak a lot about God. We can talk about him all day long: his ways, his works, his guidance; the truth is, we know very little of him. Our thoughts, our meditations, the way we speak about him, are unworthy of his glory; none of them truly reflects his perfection.

You may say that Moses was under the law when God wrapped himself in darkness, cloaking his mind in clouds of smoke and hidden practices. But through the glory of the gospel, which brought life and immortality to light, God candidly revealed himself. We now know him much more clearly and accurately. We now see his face, and not just his back, as Moses did. To which I reply,

1. I acknowledge there is a vast difference between the acquaintance we now have with God after speaking to us through his Son,[183] and the acquaintance the saints had under the law. Their eyes were as good, sharp, and clear as ours, and their faith and spiritual understanding were equal to our own. The object of their affection was as glorious to them as he is to us. And yet things are indeed clearer to us today. The clouds are blown away and scattered.[184] The shadows of the night are gone and fled away. The sun is risen, and the means of sight are better and clearer than before. Even so,

2. The unique image that Moses had of God in Exodus 34 was a gospel-image, a sight of God in his "graciousness," etc.; and yet what he saw is called God's "back." That is, it was inferior to the full extent of God's excellence and perfection.

3. The apostle extols this glory of light above that of the law. He demonstrates that now the "veil" which caused the darkness has been taken away. With "open" (or uncovered) "face we behold the glory of the Lord."[185] How do we behold? "As in a glass."[186] And how do we see in a glass? Clearly? Perfectly? Unfortunately not! He tells us how "we see through a glass, darkly."[187] He is not speaking of a telescope that helps us see things far away. We are still far short of the truth of things, even with the help of such instruments! It is a tarnished mirror he alludes to. There are only obscure images of things in its reflection, not the things themselves. This is the kind of sight he compares our knowledge to. He also tells us that everything we look at [NT:991 bepo) "by" or "through this glass," is in "a riddle" [NT:135 enigma). It is dark and obscure. And speaking of himself, someone much more clear-sighted than any of us, he tells us that he saw "in part" [NT:3313 meros) . He saw only the back of heavenly things. He compares all the knowledge that he accumulated of God to a child's understanding.[188] It is an interest [NT:5426 phroneo) that comes short of knowing it well [NT:1987 epistemai), more like coming to know [NT:1097 ginosko). In any event, "it shall be destroyed," or done away.

We know the limited comprehension and the uneasiness children have with things that are difficult to understand. We know that as children grow up those conceptions vanish, and they are ashamed of them. We instruct a child to love, honor, believe, and obey his father; because of the child's limited grasp of science and other notions, his father accepts his childishness and folly. Despite all our confidence in our accomplishments, all our notions about God are childish compared to his infinite perfection. We lisp and babble like a child. In what we say, we show our ignorance in our conceptions and notions about God. We love, honor, believe, and obey our Father; and because of that he accepts our childish thoughts, for that is what they are. We see only his back, and we know very little of him. For this reason we are often comforted in our distress by the promise that, "we will see him as he is." We will see him "face to face." We will "know him as we are known, comprehend that for which we are comprehended."[189] But for now,

"we see him not." We see only his back. We see him not as he is, not in his perfect glory, but in a dark, obscure representation.

The queen of Sheba heard a lot about Solomon, and fantasized about his magnificence. But when she actually came and saw his glory, she was forced to confess she heard only half the story. We can assume we have great knowledge, clear and high thoughts of God. But when he finally brings us into his presence we will cry out, "We never knew him as he actually is; one-thousandth of his glory, perfection, and blessedness never entered our hearts."

The apostle tells us that we do not know what we will be like.[190] We are even less able to conceive what God is, or what we will find him to be. If we consider God who is yet to be known, or we consider the way through which we might know him, then the following will become apparent:

(1.) We know so little of God, because it is God we are trying to know.

That is, God has told us repeatedly that we cannot know him. What else could he mean when he calls himself invisible, incomprehensible, and the like? We do not, and cannot, know him as he is. We know more about what he is not than what he is. So when he describes himself as immortal and infinite, we know only that he is not mortal, finite, and limited as we are. This is the reason for that glorious description of him as one, "Who alone has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach, whom no man has seen, nor can see."[191] His light is the kind no creature can approach. He is not seen because we cannot bear the sight of him, not because he cannot be seen. The light of God, in whom there is no darkness, forbids all access to him by any creature whatever. If we cannot look directly into the bright sun, we are certainly too weak to bear the beams of God's infinite brightness. When we consider his glory, as was said, the wise man calls himself "a cow without the understanding of a man."[192] That is, he knew nothing to compare to God. And so he seemed to have lost all his understanding when he began to consider God's work and his ways.

Let us get down to some specifics in this matter:

[1.] As far as the being of God - we are so far from a knowledge of it, from being able to instruct each other by words and descriptions of it, that if we were to frame any conceptions about it in our mind, we would make an idol for ourselves. We would worship a god of our own making, and not the God that made us. We may as well carve him out of wood or stone as try to form an image in our minds. The best we can do with our thoughts of the being of God is to have no thoughts of it. Our knowledge of a being is worthless when all we know is that we do not know it.

[2.] There are some things about God which he taught us to speak of, and to control our speech concerning. But when we have done so, we do not see these things themselves, nor know them. All we can do is believe and admire. We are taught, and we profess, that God is infinite, omnipotent, and eternal. We know what arguments and theories arise concerning infinity, omnipresence, immensity, and eternity. We have words and ideas about these things, but what exactly do we know or comprehend of them? Can the mind of man do anything other than be swallowed up by such a black hole? How can it conceive of what it cannot express? Our understanding is "beast-like" when we contemplate such things. We are trying to understand as if we were not beast-like.

The best our understanding can do is not to understand, and to rest there. We only have a glimpse of the back of eternity and infiniteness. What can I say about the Trinity, or how distinct persons can have the same individual essence? It is a mystery that many deny

because they cannot understand it. Who can describe the generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, or the difference between them? But I will not go any farther in particulars. That infinite and inconceivable distance between God and us keeps us in the dark. We have no sight of his face, nor clear understanding of his perfection.

We know God more by what he does than by what he is, more by doing us good than by his essential goodness. As Job puts it, how small a portion of him is heard by all this![193]

(2.) We know little of God, because it is by faith alone that we know him in this life.

I will not talk about nature impressing the hearts of all men with the knowledge that there is a God. Nor will I discuss whether men may be rationally taught concerning God from the works of his creation and providence - they can see and behold it. But it has been the regrettable experience of all ages, that no one ever glorified God as they ought to based on these evidences. Despite all their knowledge of God, they were "without God in the world."

The primary and perhaps the only acquaintance we have with God and his revelation comes by faith. "One who comes to God must believe that God exists, and that he rewards those who diligently seek him."[194] Our knowledge of him, and of his rewards, comes by believing. It is the foundation of our coming to him, and of our obedience. "We walk by faith, and not by sight;"[195] [NT:1223,4102 diapistis "caused by conviction"]. It is by faith, so that we will not have any express idea, image, or form of the One in whom we believe. Faith is all the proof we have of "things not seen,"[196]. Based on the nature of it, and from all its related concerns, what little we know of God is by faith alone. As to the source of our faith, it is built purely on the testimony of Him whom we have not seen. As the apostle asks, "How can you love him whom you have not seen?"[197] That is, how can you love someone whom you know only by faith? Faith accepts everything, including Christ, based on his testimony alone. As to its nature, faith is the result of an assent based on testimony, not the result of evidence based on a demonstration of some kind. And the object of this faith is beyond us. For this reason our faith, as observed before, is called "seeing through a glass darkly." Everything we know in this way is dark, and obscure - and all that we know of God, we know in this way.

You may say, "All this is true, but only for those who do not know God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. For those who do, it is otherwise." That too is true. "No man has ever seen God but the only-begotten Son. He has revealed him,"[198] "The Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true."[199] "The illumination of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God," shines upon believers.[200] "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into their hearts, to give them the knowledge of his glory in the face of his Son."[201] So that "though we were darkness," yet we are now "light in the Lord."[202] And the apostle says, "We all with open face behold the glory of the Lord."[203] We are now so far from being in such darkness, or at such a distance from God, that "our communion and fellowship is with the Father and with his Son."[204] You say, the light of the gospel through which God is now revealed is glorious. It is not a star, but the sun in its beauty is risen upon us, and the veil is taken from our faces. Although unbelievers, and perhaps some weak believers, may still be in some darkness, those who have grown or realized any substantial progress in their walk, do have a clear view of the face of God in Jesus Christ.

To which I answer,

(3.) No matter how much more we know through Jesus Christ, we still know very little.

[1.] The truth is, we all know enough about him to love him more than we do. We know

enough to delight in him, serve him, believe him, obey him, and put our trust in him, beyond all that we have accomplished so far. Our darkness and weakness is no excuse for our negligence and disobedience. Who can say he has lived up to the knowledge that he has of the perfection, excellence, and will of God? God's purpose in giving us any knowledge of himself here is that we may "glorify him as God." That is, we are to love him, serve him, believe and obey him, and give him all the honor and glory that is due from sinful creatures to a sin-pardoning God. We must all acknowledge that we are not thoroughly transformed into the image of that knowledge which we have received. Had we used our talents well, we might have been trusted with more.

[2.] Comparatively speaking, the knowledge which we have of God, by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel, is outstanding and glorious. It is better than any knowledge of God that might otherwise be attained, or that was delivered in the law under the Old Testament. That revelation was only the shadow of good things, not the express image of them. The apostle pursues this at length in 2Cor. 3. Christ has now revealed the Father from his own heart in these last days. He has declared his name, and made known his mind, will, and counsel in a far clearer, exalted, and distinct manner than he did under the law.

[3.] The difference in knowledge between believers and unbelievers is not so much in the matter of their knowledge as in the manner of their knowing. Some unbelievers may know more and be able to say more of God, his perfection and his will, than many believers. But they know nothing in the way they should, nothing in the right manner, nothing in a spiritual and saving way, nothing with a holy and heavenly light. The excellence of a believer is not that he has a broad understanding of things, but that what little he does understand, he sees in the saving, soul-transforming light of the Spirit of God. This is what gives us communion with God, not intellectual curiosity.

[4.] Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit, reveals God as a Father, as a covenant God, and as a rewarder to the hearts of all his people. He does this sufficiently in every way to teach us to obey him here, to lead us into his presence, and to enjoy him there for eternity. And yet,

[5.] Despite all this, we know only a little portion of him; we see only his back. That is because,

1st. The intent of all gospel revelation is not to unveil God's essential glory so that we can see him as he is. It is merely to declare as much of him as he knows will suffice to make a foundation for our faith, love, and obedience, and for us to come to him. That is, it is to make a foundation for the faith that he expects from us in this life, and the kind of services appropriate for creatures in the midst of temptations. But when he calls us to eternal admiration and contemplation without interruption, he will make a new way to discover him. The whole shape of things that now appears before us will depart like a shadow.

2nd. We are ignorant and hesitant to receive the things that are revealed in the word. Because of our infirmity and weakness, God keeps us in continual dependence on him to teach us about and reveal himself out of his word. God never brings anyone to a complete understanding and discovery of what is in the word. Although revelation in the gospel is clear and evident, we really know very little of the things that are revealed.

Let us review the purpose of considering how little we know of God. An appropriate understanding of the inconceivable greatness of God, and the infinite distance we stand from him, should fill the soul with a holy and awe-filled fear of him. If it does, the soul will be put in a frame completely unsuited for any lust to thrive or flourish. If we keep the soul continually

accustomed to reverential thoughts of God's greatness and omnipresence, then it will be on its guard for any inappropriate behavior. Consider the One with whom you have to deal. "Our God is a consuming fire."[205] In your greatest shame in his presence and sight, know that your very nature is too limited to comprehend his essential glory.

CHAPTER 13

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST FALSE PEACE

- When the heart is disturbed by sin, do not speak peace to it until God speaks peace to it
- Peace, without detesting sin, is unwise; so is peace that we authorize ourselves
- How to know when we authorize our own peace
- Directions for authorizing peace to ourselves
- The uselessness of speaking peace carelessly; or doing it singularly and not universally.

The NINTH direction: Do not speak peace about a sin until God speaks it.

If God makes the heart uneasy about the guilt of its sickness, as to its root or indwelling, or its particular outbursts, be careful not to tell yourself to have peace about it before God tells you to have peace. Listen to what he says to your soul. This is our next direction. If we fail to observe this caution, the heart will be terribly exposed to the deceitfulness of sin.

This has great importance. It is a sad thing for a man to deceive his own soul this way. All the warnings God tenderly gives us to try and examine ourselves, tend to prevent this great evil of speaking peace to ourselves groundlessly. It is like blessing ourselves in opposition to God. It is not my purpose to prove the danger of it, but to help believers prevent it, and to let them know when they are doing it. To manage this instruction correctly, observe the following:

1. It is the great prerogative and sovereignty of God to give grace and peace to whom he pleases.

"He has mercy on whom he will."[206] Among all the sons of men, he calls whom he pleases, and he sanctifies whom he pleases. Among those called and justified, among those he will save, among those on whom he has bestowed grace, he still reserves the privilege to speak peace to whom he pleases, to the degree he pleases.

He is the "God of all consolation" in a special way in dealing with believers.[207] That is, of the good things that he keeps locked up for his family, he gives out of this storehouse to all his children at his pleasure. The Lord insists on doing this. "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, says the LORD, and I will heal him."[208] It is the same case I am making here. When God says that he will heal their sin and sadness, he retains this privilege for himself in an special way. "I create the fruit." He is saying, "Even for these poor wounded creatures, I will create peace in accord with my sovereignty. I will distribute it as I please."

For this reason, what God does is curious, as we will find when we examine saving grace for those in the state of nature. In its outward appearance, the way he saves some and leaves others is often contrary to all probable expectations. That is how it is when he communicates peace and joy to those in the state of grace. He gives out peace and joy quite apart from our expectations, without any apparent reason for his apportionment.

2. It is the prerogative of Christ to speak peace home to the conscience.

Just as God creates peace for whom he pleases, so it is the prerogative of Christ to speak it home to the conscience. The lukewarm church of Laodicea thought she was rich because she had worldly wealth. But in fact she was spiritually poor, blind, and naked. She healed her wounds falsely. She spoke peace to herself when she should not have. Addressing them in the book of Revelation, Christ takes the title of primary witness, "I am the Amen, the faithful Witness."[209] He testifies concerning our true condition. We might mistake our condition, and trouble ourselves needlessly, or we might flatter ourselves on false grounds. But he is the "Amen, the faithful Witness." What he says about our condition is fact. It is said that he does not "judge after the sight of his eyes."[210] He does not judge according to any outward appearance, or anything that may be subject to a mistake, as we are likely to do. Instead, he judges and determines every cause as it is indeed.

Rules to know whether God is speaking peace about a sin or it is false peace:

Take these two previous observations, and I will give some rules by which to know whether it is God speaking peace to us, or whether we are only speaking peace to ourselves.

Rule 1: God is not speaking peace if there is no hatred of the sin or self-loathing

Men are certainly speaking peace to themselves if they do not have the greatest hatred imaginable of their sin, and they do not abhor themselves for it. When men are wounded, disturbed, and bewildered by sin, and they know that there is no remedy apart from the mercy of God through the blood of Christ, they look to him. They look to the promises of the covenant in him. After doing so, they quiet their hearts. They know that it will be well with them. They know that God will be exalted, and that he may be gracious to them. But if their souls are not driven to the greatest hatred of the sin that disquieted them, then this healing, this sense of peace, comes from themselves, and not from God. It is strong wind that the Lord is near, but the Lord is not in the wind.[211] When men truly "look on Christ whom they have pierced," without whom there is no healing or peace, they will "mourn."[212] They will mourn for him because of this transgression of theirs, and they will detest the sin that pierced him.

When we go to Christ for healing, faith looks at him specifically as the one who is pierced. Faith takes several views of Christ based on the circumstances in which he is addressed, and based on the type of communion that it has with him. Sometimes faith views his holiness, sometimes his power, sometimes his love, and sometimes his favor with his Father. And when faith goes to him for healing and for peace, it looks especially on the blood of the covenant, and on Christ's sufferings. That is because "with his stripes we are healed, and the punishment for our peace was on him."[213] So when we look to him for healing, his stripes are to be viewed, not in their outward cruel story (which is the course the Roman Catholics take), but in the love, kindness, mystery, and design of the cross. And when we look to him for peace, his punishment must be viewed. If this is done according to the mind of God, and in the strength of the Spirit poured out on believers, it will produce a hatred of that sin for which healing and peace is sought. God tells us, "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you."[214] And what happens then? "Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed."

When God establishes a sure covenant of peace with us, it fills the soul with shame for all the

ways through which it has been alienated from him. And one of the things that the apostle mentions as attending that godly sorrow, is revenge against the sin: "Behold, you had godly sorrow: what eagerness it evoked in you, what apologies, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what revenge!"[215] The Corinthians reflected on their sins with indignation and revenge for their folly in them.

As Job realizes thorough healing, he cries, "Now I abhor myself."[216] Until he did so, he had no lasting peace. He might perhaps have excused himself based on that doctrine of free grace so excellently preached by Elihu,[217] but he would only have put a bandage on his wounds. He must reach self-abhorrence if he is to be healed. So it was with those in Psalm 78:33-35 who suffered great trouble and confusion brought on by sin. They address God in Christ, which is evident from the titles they use. They call him their Rock and Redeemer, two words which everywhere point to the Lord Christ. I have no doubt that they spoke peace to themselves. But was it sound and lasting? No. It passed away like the early dew. God does not speak one word of peace to their souls. But why did they not have peace? Because, in their address to God, they flattered him. "Nevertheless they flattered him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues."[218]

But how does that happen? "Their heart was not right with him, nor were they faithful in his covenant."[219] They did not detest or relinquish the sin about which they spoke peace to themselves. A man may petition for healing and peace, make it to the true Physician, do it in the right way, and quiet his heart in the promises of the covenant. Yet, when peace is spoken, if it is not accompanied by the hatred and abhorrence of that sin which wounded him and caused his distress, then this is not a peace of God's creating. It is a peace of his own purchasing. He is simply putting a bandage over the wound that remains untreated beneath. It will putrefy, rot, and deteriorate, until it breaks out again with screams, pain, and danger. People who speak peace to themselves know that the trouble with sin involves more than just the uncleanness that comes with it. They know enough to ask for mercy from the Lord in Christ. And yet they keep the sweet morsel of their sin under their tongue. People who walk this path should never think to have true and solid peace.

For instance, you may find your heart running after the world. This disturbs you in your communion with God. The Spirit expressly says to you, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."[220] This sends you to God in Christ to heal your soul and quiet your conscience; yet you do not thoroughly detest the evil itself. Or maybe you detest it well enough, but only because of the consequences. Perhaps you may be saved, but not without going through fire.[221] God will have some work with you before he is done. But you will have little peace in this life. You will be sick and weak all your days.[222]

This is a deceit that lies at the root of the peace of many who profess Christ. It exhausts their peace. They bargain with all their strength about mercy and pardon, and they seem to have great communion with God in doing so. They lie before him and bewail their sins and follies. Anyone would think, as they probably do, that surely they are now parted from their sins. And so they receive the mercy that satisfies their hearts for a short time. But when closely examined, they have kept some secret reserve in their hearts for their folly. At least, they have not had the thorough abhorrence that is necessary to purge this sin. Their entire peace is weak and rotten. It will last only until the words begging for it are past their lips.

Rule 2: God is not speaking peace if it is based on convictions and rational conclusions.

When men measure out peace to themselves based on their convictions and rational conclusions, this is a false peace, and it will not continue. I will explain a little what I mean by this. A man has a wound caused by sin. He is convicted by it in his conscience. He has not walked upright in a way worthy of the gospel. Therefore, all is not well and right between God and his soul. He now considers what should be done. He has the Light of Scripture, and he knows what path he must take. He knows how his soul has been healed in the past. He considers that the promises of God are the outward means he can apply to heal his wound and quiet his heart. He searches for these promises in the Scripture, and finds one or more directly suited to his condition. He says to himself, "God speaks about my sin in this promise. I will put on a bandage as long and as wide as my wound." And so he applies the word of the promise to his condition, and he sets himself down in peace.

This is some other kind of appearance on the mount. The Lord is near, but the Lord is not in it. It has not been the work of the Spirit, who alone can "convince us of sin, righteousness, and judgment." [223] These are the mere actions of the intelligent, rational soul. We say there are three sorts of life: the vegetative (growing), the sensitive (responding to environment), and the rational or intelligent (analytical). Some things are only vegetative. Some are both vegetative and sensitive. Some are rational, which includes both the others. Someone who is rational acts rationally, but he also acts according to both the other qualities: he grows and he is responsive.

It is like that with men in the things of God. Some are mere natural and rational men, some have additional conviction with illumination, and some are truly regenerate. Someone who is regenerate is also rational and enlightened. Therefore, sometimes he may act on rational principles, sometimes on enlightened principles, and sometimes on regenerate principles. His true spiritual life is not the standard for all of his behavior. He does not always act on the basis of his spiritual beliefs, nor do all of his fruits come from that source. In this case I'm speaking of, he is merely acting on the principle of conviction with illumination, through which his rationality is heightened; but the Spirit does not breathe on all these waters at all.

Take this example: Suppose the wound and disquiet in a man's soul is caused by relapses. Whatever the evil or folly may be, no matter how small, there are no wounds given the soul that are deeper, nor have greater torment, than those caused by repeatedly returning to an evil. In his distress, the man finds this promise, "The LORD will have mercy, and our God will abundantly pardon."[224] That is, God will multiply or add to pardon; he will do it again and again. Or he finds this promise, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."[225] The man considers these two promises, and based on them, he concludes that he may have peace. He does so whether the Spirit of God applies this peace to him or not, and whether that gives life and power to the letter of God's word or not. He does not even consider such things. He does not even listen to whether the Lord God speaks this peace to him. He does not wait for God, who perhaps still hides his face from him. He sees the poor creature stealing peace and running away with it. God knows that the time will come when he will deal with him again, and when he will call him to a new reckoning.[226] But he will do so only after this man sees that it is useless to go anywhere that God does not take him by the hand.

I see a number of other questions that arise and interpose themselves here. I cannot address them all, but one I want to say a little about.

It may be said, "Seeing that this seems to be the path that the Holy Spirit leads us in to heal our wounds and quiet our hearts, how do we know when we take this path alone, and when the Spirit also accompanies us?"

Ans. (1.) If any of you are out of the way of this rule, God will quickly let you know it. Besides the

fact that you have his promise that "he will guide the meek in judgment and teach them his way,"[227] he will not let you continue to err. He will not allow your nakedness to be covered with fig leaves. He will take them away and remove all the peace that you find in them. He will not allow you to settle for such remnants. You will quickly know your wound is not healed. That is, you will quickly know whether you have stolen this peace. The peace you obtain this way will not last. While the mind is overpowered by its own convictions, there is nothing for the anxiety to fix on. Wait a little, and all these rationalizations will grow cold and vanish before the face of the first temptation that arises.

Ans. (2.) This course of rationalization is commonly taken without waiting, which is the grace. Waiting is that unique action of faith which God calls for in such a condition. I know God does sometimes work on the soul instantly, wounding and healing it, as I am persuaded was David's case when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment.[228] But ordinarily, God calls for waiting and laboring,[229] as a servant might watch and wait on his master. Says the prophet Isaiah, "I will wait on the LORD, who hides his face from the house of Jacob."[230] When they have run from his house, God wants his children to sit on his doorstep awhile, and not instantly rush in on him. If they are so ashamed that they dare not come to him, he takes them by the hand and pulls them inside. Now, self-healers, or men who speak peace to themselves, commonly rush in. They will not hesitate. They do not listen to what God says, but on in they go to be healed.[231]

Ans. (3.) Such a course of action, though it may quiet the conscience and the mind, does not sweeten the heart with rest and gracious contentment. The answer it receives is much like the one Elisha gave to Naaman, "Go in peace."[232] It quieted his mind, but I question whether it sweetened his heart, or gave him any joy in believing, other than the natural joy that came over him when he was healed. "Do not my words do good,"[233] asks the Lord? When God speaks, there is not only truth in his words to answer the conviction of our understanding, but his words also do good. They bring soothing which is sweet, and good, and desirable to the will and to the emotions. By these words, the "soul returns to its rest."[234]

Ans. (4.) The worst aspect of rationalizing, is that it does not improve the life, nor heal the evil, nor cure the disease. When God speaks peace, it guides and keeps the soul so that it "does not return again to folly."[235] When we speak peace to ourselves, the heart is not dissuaded from its evil. It is the surest way to practice backsliding. After bandaging yourself, if you find you are in a battle again, rather than being completely weaned from your sin, then it is too obvious that you have been working on your own soul. Jesus Christ and his Spirit were not there. Often, having done its work, our intellectual nature comes for its reward after only a few days. That is, having instigated this false healing, the intellect is ready to justify applying its own peace again when a new wound occurs. When God speaks peace, there is so much sweetness, and such revealing of his love, that it strongly obligates the soul to turn back from this sin.[236]

Rule 3: We speak peace to ourselves when we do it carelessly.

The prophet complains of this in some teachers: "They have healed the wound of the daughter of my people carelessly."[237] The same is true with some who heal their own wounds with a careless effort. A glance of faith to the promises will do it, and we are done. The apostle tells us that "the word did not benefit" some because "it was not mixed with faith,"[238] [NT:4786 sugkerannumi]. "It was not well tempered" and mingled with faith. It is not a mere look to the word of mercy in the promise that heals, but mingling the promise with faith until it is incorporated into its very nature. Then the word will indeed do the soul good. If you had a

wound in your conscience that was accompanied by weakness and anxiety, and you are now freed of it, how did you manage that? "I looked to the promises of pardon and healing, and so I found peace." That may be so, but perhaps you were too hasty. You were too obvious. You have not fed on the promise in a way that mixes it with faith, and diffuses all its virtue into your soul. You did it carelessly. Before long you will find your wound breaking out again, and you will know that you are not cured.

Rule 4: God is not speaking peace if we are holding onto another sin.

Someone may speak peace to himself about one evil, while having another evil, of no less importance to his spirit, that he has not brought to God. That man cries "Peace" when there is none. A little to explain my meaning: perhaps a man has neglected a spiritual duty again and again, when by rights it was due from him. His conscience is troubled. His soul is wounded. He has no quiet in his bones because of his sin. He applies himself to healing, and he finds peace. Meantime there remains in his heart worldliness, or pride, or some other folly that seriously grieves the Spirit of God. It does not bother him, nor does he bother it. He had better not think any of his alleged peace comes from God. It is better to have an equal respect for all of God's commandments. God will justify us from our sins, but he will not justify the smallest sin in us. "He is a God of purer eyes than to gaze at wickedness." [239]

Rule 5: God is not speaking peace if there is no humiliation in our souls.

When men speak peace to their consciences on their own, God seldom speaks humiliation to their souls. God's peace is a humbling peace, a melting peace. This was David's case. He was never in deeper humiliation than when Nathan brought him news of his pardon. [240]

You ask, "When may we take the comfort of a promise as our own, and use it to quiet our heart in response to some particular wound?"

First, generally when God speaks peace, he may do it in the very instant of the sin itself. He does it with such irresistible power that the soul must receive his mind in it. Sometimes he makes us wait longer. But when he does speak, whether sooner or later, whether we are sinning or repenting, and regardless of the condition of our souls, if God speaks, he must be acknowledged. There is nothing in our communion with him that troubles the Lord more, if I may say so, than our unbelieving fears that keep us from receiving the strong consolation that he is so willing to give us.

You may now say, "When God speaks peace, we must receive it. That is true. But how will we know when he speaks?"

(1.) I wish we could all get to the point of receiving peace when we are convinced that God speaks it, and realize that it is our duty to receive it. But,

(2.) There is a secret instinct in faith, through which it knows the voice of Christ when he speaks. Just as the baby leaped in the womb when the blessed Virgin came to Elizabeth, faith leaps in the heart when Christ draws near to it. "My sheep," says Christ, "know my voice."[241] "They know my voice; they are used to the sound of it." and they know when his lips are opened to them, full of grace. The spouse was sad and securely asleep, but as soon as Christ spoke, she cries, "It is the voice of my beloved that speaks!"[242] She knew his voice. She was so familiar with him, that she instantly recognized him, and so will you. If you make an effort to acquaint yourself with him and commune with him, you will easily discern between his voice and the voice of a stranger.

And take this with you: when he does speak, he speaks like no man ever spoke. He speaks with power. One way or another he will make your "hearts burn within you," as he did to the disciples.[243] He does it by "putting his hand through the hole of the door,"[244], by putting his Spirit in your hearts to take hold of you. The person who exercises his senses to discern good or evil, who improves his judgment and experience by constantly observing Christ's methods, by studying the way the Spirit operates, and the effect his peace usually produces, is the best judge for himself whether it is Christ who speaks.

Secondly, if the word of the Lord does your soul good, then he speaks it. If it humbles you, cleanses you, and is useful for those purposes for which the promises are given (to endear, to cleanse, to melt and bind to obedience, to empty yourself, etc.), then he speaks it. If you do not see these things in the peace you receive, then it is not from God, and sin will have a great opportunity to harden your heart.

CHAPTER 14

NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST

- The general use of the previous directions
- How to accomplish the work aimed at: act with faith in Christ
- Several ways through which this may be done
- Consider the sufficiency of Christ for relief
- Great expectations from Christ
- Grounds for these expectations: his mercifulness and faithfulness
- Events of these expectations: on the part of Christ; on the part of believers
- Faith on which we act is based on the death of Christ, Rom. 6:3-6
- The work of the Spirit in all of this

All the considerations previously expressed prepare us to mortify sin, rather than accomplish it. I have been focusing on sufficiently preparing the heart for the work itself. Without this preparation, mortification will not be accomplished. Specific directions for the work itself are very few. They follow:

1. Set your faith on enlisting Christ to kill your sin.

His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this belief, and you will die a conqueror. Truly, you will live to see your lust dead at your feet through the good providence of God. "How does faith enlist Christ for this purpose?" Several ways:

(1.) By faith, fully consider the provision we have in Jesus Christ for this purpose.

If you do, then all your lusts, including the particular lust you are entangled by, may be mortified. By faith ponder this: although you are unable to conquer your disease by yourself, and you are weary of fighting with it, and you are exhausted by it, there is enough strength in Jesus Christ to bring you relief. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."[245] It sustained the prodigal son when he was ready to faint, knowing that there was enough bread stored in his father's house.[246] Although he was still at a distance, the knowledge that it was there relieved him, and braced him. In your greatest distress and anguish, consider that fullness of grace.[247] Consider those riches, those treasures of strength, might, and help, that are stored in Christ for our support. "They that wait on the LORD will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles."[248] Let these considerations enter and remain in your mind. Consider that he is "lifted up and made a Prince and a Savior to give repentance to Israel."[249] If he is a Savior to give repentance, then he is a Savior to give mortification, without which there is no repentance. Christ tells us that we obtain purging grace by remaining in him.[250] If we act in reliance on the fullness we have in Christ, then we have an excellent way to remain in Christ, because both our grafting in and our indwelling come by faith.[251]

Let your soul admit this: "I am a pitiful, weak creature, unstable as water. I cannot excel. This corruption is too hard for me, and it is on the verge of ruining my soul. I do not know what to do. My soul has become like parched ground, and a habitat for dragons. I have made promises and broken them; vows and engagements have meant nothing to me. I have had many temptations over which I got the victory. I should be delivered, but I am deceived. So I can plainly see that without some superior help, I am lost. If I continue on this path, I will be

triumphed over until I completely relinquish God. But although this is my condition, let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and the weak knees be strengthened. Behold the Lord Christ, who has all the fullness of grace in his heart and all the fullness of power in his hand.[252] He is able to slay all these who are his enemies." There are sufficient provisions in Christ for my relief and assistance. He can take my drooping, dying soul and make me more than a conqueror.[253]

> Why do you say, my soul, that my way is hidden from the LORD, and my case is passed over by my God? Have you not known or heard that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, and is not weary? There is no searching his understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to those that have no might he increases strength. Even the youths will faint and be weary, and the young men shall completely collapse: but those that wait on the LORD will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run, and not be weary; they will walk and not faint.[254]

He can make the "dry, parched ground of my soul become a pool, and my thirsty, barren heart springs of water." Indeed, he can make this habitat of dragons, this heart, so full of abominable lusts and fiery temptations, a place for "grass" and fruit for himself."[255]

When tempted by his thorn, God braced Paul by considering his grace: "My grace is sufficient for you,"[256] Though he was not given grace immediately to free him from his temptation, the fact that there was sufficient grace in God to do just that, was enough to brace his spirit. So then, by faith consider the supply of grace and its fullness in Jesus Christ. Consider how he can give you strength and freedom at any time. By considering this, even if you do not conquer it, you will remain in the chariot so that you will not flee the field until the battle is over. You will be kept from complete despair, and from collapsing under your unbelief. You will be kept from turning to false means and remedies that do nothing to relieve you. The effectiveness of this consideration will be found only by practicing it.

(2.) Bolster your heart by faith to expect relief from Christ.

Relief in this case is like the prophet's vision, "It is for an appointed time. But after, it will speak and not lie. Though it takes its time, wait for it, because it will surely come. It will not be late."[257] While you are still troubled, the wait may seem long to you. Nonetheless, relief will surely come at the appointed time of the Lord Jesus (which is the best season). If you can bolster your heart to definitely expect relief from Jesus Christ, then your soul will be satisfied. If your eyes are towards him "as the eyes of a servant to the hand of his master" when he expects to receive something from him,[258] then he will certainly rescue you. He will slay the lust, and you will realize peace. Only look for it in his hand; expect when and how he will do it. "If you will not believe, surely you will not be established."[259]

You may ask, "What grounds do I have for such an expectation, so that I may not be deceived?"

You do not have a choice. Of necessity you must take this course. You must be relieved and saved in this way or not at all. To whom will you go?[260] There are countless things in the Lord Jesus to encourage and engage you in this expectation. I spoke of its necessity before, when I demonstrated that mortification is the work of faith, and it is for believers only. "Without me," says Christ, "you can do nothing." He was speaking especially of purging the heart from sin.[261] Mortification of any sin must be by a supply of grace. We cannot do it ourselves.

Now, "it has pleased the Father that in Christ all fullness should dwell,"[262] so that "of his fullness we might receive grace for grace."[263] He is the head from which the new man must receive his influence of life and strength, or he will decay every day. If we are "strengthened with might in the inner man," [264] it is by "Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith."[265] I have also shown before that this work is not to be done without the Spirit. From where, then, do we expect the Spirit? From whom do we look for him? Who has promised him to us, having procured him for us? Shouldn't all our expectations for the Spirit's help be on Christ alone? Let this, then, be fixed in your heart: if you do not have relief from Christ, then you will never have any relief at all. All ways, all endeavors, and all struggles that are not prompted by this expectation of relief from Christ, and from him alone, serve no purpose. They will do you no good. Indeed, if they do anything other than support your heart in this expectation, or if they are not the means appointed by Christ to receive help from him, then they are useless.

To further engage you in this expectation,

(1.) Consider Christ's mercifulness, tenderness, and kindness.

He is our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Certainly he pities you in your distress. He says, "As one comforted by his mother, so I will comfort you."[266] He has the tenderness of a mother to a suckling child. "Therefore, in all things he was obliged to be made like his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things of God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to relieve those that are being tempted."[267]

How is Christ's ability affected by his suffering? "Because he himself suffered being tempted, he is able…" Did the sufferings and temptations of Christ add to his ability and power? Not in themselves. The ability here refers to its readiness, proneness, and willingness to exert itself. It is an ability of will against all dissuasions. He is able, having suffered and been tempted, to break through all dissuasions to the contrary, to relieve poor tempted souls: "He is able to help." [NT:1426 dunamai "power"] It is a figure of speech for the effect. He can now be moved to help, having been so tempted.

> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our frailty. He was in all ways tempted as we are, yet he did not sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in our time of need.[268]

The exhortation in Heb. 4:16 speaks to the issue of expecting relief from Christ, which the apostle calls "grace for opportune help," [NT:5485,996,2121 charis… boetheiaeukairos]. Says the soul, "If ever help were opportune, it would be right now. This is what I long for: grace for opportune help. I am ready to die, to perish, to be lost forever; wickedness will triumph over me if help does not come." The apostle is saying, "Expect this help, this relief, this grace from Christ." Indeed, but on what basis? The basis is laid down in verse 15: Christ sympathizes with our frailty. Note verse 16, "that we may obtain mercy." The word which we have translated to "obtain" is [NT:2983 lambano], "That we may receive it."

Suitable and opportune help will come. Bolster the soul by faith. Expect relief from Jesus Christ[269] because of his mercifulness as our high priest. This one thing will do more to ruin your lust and affliction, and do it better and faster, than the most rigid means of self-denial any man ever engaged in. Truly, let me add that no one who could bolster his soul by faith to expect relief from Jesus Christ,[270] ever did or ever will perish by the power of a lust, sin, or

corruption.

(2.) Consider the faithfulness of the One who has promised.

This may bolster and confirm you while you are waiting expectantly for relief. He has promised to relieve us in such cases, and he will fulfill his word completely. God tells us that his covenant with us is like the "ordinances" of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, which have their certain courses.[271] Accordingly, David said that he watched for relief from God "as one watched for the morning."[272] It is a thing that will certainly come in its appointed season, and so will your relief from Christ. It will come in its season like dew and rain on parched ground, because the one who has promised is faithful. Specific Scriptural promises for this purpose are found throughout the Bible. Always be ready to furnish someone with a few that seem uniquely suited to his condition.

Now, there are two excellent advantages which always attend this expectation of assistance from Jesus Christ:

[1.] Such expectation enlists Christ's quick and complete assistance.

If someone has offered to help and promises to give relief, then nothing will enlist his heart to be useful and helpful more than someone else expecting it. Our Lord Jesus has encouraged this expectation in us by his kindness, his care, and his promises. Certainly our expectation must engage him to assist us accordingly. The Psalmist gives us this as a reliable maxim, "You, LORD, never abandon those who put their trust in you."[273] Once the heart is won to rest in God, to repose on him, God will certainly satisfy it. He will never be like water that fails to quench. Nor has he said at any time to the seed of Jacob, "You seek my face in vain." If Christ is chosen as the source of our supply, then he will not fail us.

[2.] Such expectation makes the heart attentively listen for Christ.

Such expectation makes the heart diligently pay attention to all the ways and means through which Christ is likely to communicate himself to the soul. It accepts the real assistance of all graces and ordinances. If we expect something from a man, we apply ourselves to all the ways and means through which his help may be obtained. The beggar who expects an alm lies in the doorway or in the path of the person from whom he expects to receive it. Christ's ordinances are the way through which he ordinarily communicates himself to us. Someone who expects something from him must attend to his ordinances. It is faith's expectation that sets the heart to work in this way.

I am not talking about an idle, or groundless hope. If there is any strength, effectiveness, and power to mortify a sin through prayer or sacrament, then this expectation of relief from Christ will certainly make a man interested in it. Hence, I reduce all my behavior, whether by prayer, meditation, or the like, to this foundational truth: I can expect help from Christ by it. There is no other need to emphasize these disciplines when they are founded on this base and spring from this root. They are uniquely suited to this purpose of expecting help, and no other.

Now, as for this direction to mortify a prevailing lust, you may have a thousand proofs that expecting help from Christ is crucial to mortifying sin. Anyone who has walked with God under such temptation, has found it useful and successful. I will leave this topic without adding any more. I will only mention some particulars relating to what has been.

First, let your faith act specifically on Christ crucified and slain.

Let your faith act specifically on the death, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, on Christ crucified

and slain. Mortification of sin flows uniquely from the death of Christ. He died to destroy the works of the devil. It is one exceptional outcome of the death of Christ that will certainly be fulfilled. Whatever came over our nature by the devil's first temptation, whatever gains strength in us by the devil's daily propositions, Christ died to destroy it all. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all wickedness, and purify for himself a special people, zealous of good works."[274] This was his aim and intent in giving himself for us (and he will not fail). His design was to free us from the power of our sins, and purify us from all our defiling lusts. "He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church. It would not have a spot, a wrinkle, or a blemish, but instead it would be holy."[275] And, in varying degrees, this will be accomplished as a result of his death.

For this reason, our washing, purging, and cleansing is attributed to his blood.[276] Sprinkling it on us "purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God."[277] This is what we aim at. This is what we pursue: to purge our consciences from dead works, and root out these acts of death, destroying them so they no longer have a place in us. This will certainly be brought about by the death of Christ, and virtue will bloom from it for this purpose. Indeed, all supplies of the Spirit, all communications of grace and power, come from the death of Christ, as I have shown elsewhere.[278] This is how the apostle states it: "How can we, who are dead to sin, live in it any longer?"[279] Dead to sin by profession; dead to sin because it is our obligation; dead to sin because virtue and power are provided to kill it; dead to sin because of our union with and our regard for Christ through whom it is killed: how can we live in sin?

Paul presses this using several considerations in the ensuing verses. All of them are taken from the death of Christ. This must not be: "Do you not know that those of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"[280] Baptism is evidence that we are implanted into Christ, baptized into him. But what interest do we gain in him by being baptized? "His death," Paul says. If we are indeed baptized into Christ, beyond mere formality, then we are baptized into his death. The apostle gives us an explanation of being baptized into the death of Christ in Romans 6:4, 6. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we may also walk in newness of life. Knowing that our old man is crucified with him, rendering the body of sin without effect, we should not serve sin as a slave anymore." He is saying, "This is being baptized into the death of Christ, namely, to be dead to sin, to have our sins put to death just as he was put to death for our sins. This was done so that we may be raised up to grace and newness of life, just as he was raised up to glory." He tells us why we have this baptism into the death of Christ: "Our old man is crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be destroyed,"[281] [NT:4957 sustauroo]. It is "crucified with him," not as to its timing, but as to its cause. We are crucified with him,

- meritoriously, in that he procured the Spirit for us to mortify sin;
- efficiently, in that from his death virtue blooms to enable us to crucify sin;
- representatively, in that we will certainly be crucified to sin, just as he was for our sin.

This is what the apostle means: by his death, Christ destroyed the works of the devil, procured the Spirit for us, and killed the reign of sin in believers in such a way that it will not realize its goal, which is to control and destroy us.

Secondly, expect power and then endeavor to conform to Christ.

Let your faith act on the death of Christ in two ways: first by expecting power, and then by endeavoring to conform.[282] For the first, the general direction I gave above should suffice. As for the latter, the apostle's direction may shed some light. Let faith look on Christ as he is

described in the gospel: dying and crucified for us. Look at him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, and dying.[283] By faith bring him in that condition into your heart. Apply his blood, shed for you, to your sin - and do it daily. I might go on at great length using various examples, but I must come to a close.

2. The work of the Spirit in mortification.

All I have left to add is the work of the Spirit in this business of mortification, which is so uniquely assigned to him. This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is accomplished in all its aspects by the power of the Spirit. Such as,

(1.) The Spirit alone convicts the heart of its sin.

He alone clearly and fully convinces the heart of the evil, the guilt, and the danger of the immorality, lust, or sin that is to be mortified. Without this conviction, or while it is so faint that the heart can hardly wrestle with or absorb it, there will be no progress.

An unbelieving heart (as we all partly have) will sidestep any consideration of sin until it is overpowered by clear and obvious convictions. Now, this is the proper work of the Spirit: "He convicts the world of sin."[284] He alone can do it. If men's rational consideration of the word were able to convince them of sin, we would see more convictions than we do. Preaching the word lets men understand that they are sinners, and that certain things are sins, and that they are guilty of them, but this light is not powerful enough. It does not lay hold of the practical beliefs of the soul in a way that conforms the mind and will to them, and produces behavior appropriate to such an understanding.

And so wise and knowledgeable men, who do not have the Spirit, do not consider the behavior associated with lust to be sins at all. The Spirit alone convicts them of it. This is the first thing the Spirit does to mortify a lust. It convinces the soul of all the evil of its lust. It cuts off all of its protests, discovers all its deceits, stops all its evasions, and answers all its pretenses. It makes the soul own its abomination, and makes it submit in recognition of it. Unless this is done, all that follows is in vain.

(2.) The Spirit alone reveals to us the fullness of Christ for our relief.

This is the consideration that keeps the heart from false ways and from despair.[285]

(3.) The Spirit alone bolsters the heart to expect relief from Christ.

This is the great sovereign means of mortification, as we discovered.[286]

(4.) The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power.

The Spirit baptizes us into the death of Christ

(5.) The Spirit is the author and finisher of our sanctification.

He gives new supplies and influences of grace for our holiness and sanctification, when the control of sin is weakened.[287]

(6.) The Spirit supports the soul's petitions to God.

In all the soul's petitions to God while it is in this condition, it has support from the Spirit. Where do the power, life, and strength of prayer come from? Where does its effectiveness

come from to prevail with God? Do these not come from the Spirit? He is the "Spirit of earnest prayer" promised to those "who look at the one they have pierced,"[288] who enables them "to pray with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed."[289]

This is the great way that faith prevails with God. That is how Paul dealt with his temptation, whatever it was: "I pleaded with the Lord that it might leave me."[290] It is the work of the Spirit in prayer that assists us and makes us victorious. It is not my present intent to demonstrate how and by what means he does that, nor what we are to do so that we may enjoy his help for that purpose.[291]

The End

Notes

[← 1]
Rom. 6:23

[←2]
Rom. 10:3, 4; John 15:5

[←3]
Rom. 6:19

[←4]
Matt. 3:10

[←5]
Rom. 8:6

[←6]
Gal. 5:24

[←7]
Rom. 6:6

[←8]
Rom. 6:8

[←9]
Rom. 6:3-5

[← 10]
Gal. 5:17

[← 11]
Gal. 6:8

[← 12]
1 Thess. 3:8

[← 13]
Col. 3:5; 1Cor. 9:27

[← 14]

Phil. 3:12; 1Cor. 13:12; 2 Pet. 3:18; Gal. 5:17, etc.

[← 15]

Rom. 7:23; James 4:5; Heb. 12:1

[← 16]
Gal. 5:17; 2 Pet. 1:4, 5; Rom. 7:23

[←17]
Rev. 3:2; Heb. 3:13

[← 18]
Col. 3:1-5

[← 19]
John 15:2

[←20]
1Cor. 9:27

[←21]
Phil. 3:12

[←22]
2Cor. 4:16

[←23]
1Cor. 13:12

[←24]
2 Pet. 3:18

[←25]
Gal. 5:1 7

[←26]

I John 1:8

[←27]
Rom. 7:24

[←28]
Phil. 3:21

[←29]

Gal. 6:9; Heb. 12:1; 2Cor. 7:1

[←30]
Rom. 7:23

[←31]
James 4:5

[←32]
Gal. 5:17

[←33]
James 1:14

[←34]
Rom. 7:18-19

[←35]
Mk. 7:23

[←36]
Gal. 5:17

[←37]
Heb. 12:1

[←38]

Gal. 5:19-21

[←39]

Prov. 30:15,16

[←40]
Heb. 3:13

[←41]
Gal. 5:17

[←42]
2 Pet. 1:4,5

[←43]
2Cor. 4:16

[←44]
Rev. 3:2

[←45]
Heb. 3:13

[←46]

Ps. 31:10, 51:8

[←47]
Ps. 38:3-5

[←48]
Ps. 40:12, Isa. 33:25

[←49]
2 John 8

[←50]
2Cor. 7:1.

[←51]
1 Pet. 2:2, 2 Pet. 3:18

[←52]
2Cor. 4:16

[←53]
Gal. 5:19-21

[←54]

I John 1:7, Tit. 2:14

[←55]
Acts 5:31

[←56]
Tit. 2:11, 12

[←57]
2 Pet. 2:20

[←58]

This idea of “walking” is a metaphor for acting out the Christian life of faith.

[←59]
Ezek. 11:19, 36:26

[←60]
Gal. 5:19-23

[←61]

Ezek. 11:19, 36:26

[←62]
Isa. 57:17,18

[←63]
John 15:5

[←64]
Acts 5:31

[←65]
Acts 2:33

[←66]
Tit. 3:5

[←67]
Isa. 4:4

[←68]
Phil. 2:13

[←69]
Isa. 26:12

[← 70]

2 Thess. 1:11, Col. 2:12

[←71]

Rom. 8:26, Zech. 12:10

[←72]
Ps. 88

[←73]
Isa. 57:18, 19

[← 74]

Rom. 8:16

[←75]
Ps. 38:3

[← 76]
Ps. 40:12

[←77]

I John. 2:15, 3:17

[←78]
Hos. 5:13

[←79]
Rev. 3:2

[←80]
Phil. 3:12

[←81]
Col. 2:10

[←82]
Acts 8:23

[←83]
2Cor. 7:11

[←84]
Ps. 78:32-37

[←85]
Gen. 6:5

[←86]
Rom. 13:14.

[←87]
1 Pet. 2:11

[←88]

James 1:14, 15

[←89]

I Cor. 6:18

[←90]
Gal. 5:24

[←91]
2Cor. 4:16

[←92]

1John 2:16

[←93]
Ps. 40:12

[←94]
1 Kings 8:38

[←95]
2 Chr. 16:10

[←96]
Ps. 51:3

[←97]
Col. 3:5

[←98]
Rom. 8:13

[←99]

Rom. 8:1

[← 100]
Col. 3:5

[←101]
Col. 3:1

[← 102]

Rom. 9:31-32

[← 103]
Rom. 8:9

[← 104]

Mal. 3:2, 3

[← 105]

Jer. 6:29, 30

[← 106]
Acts 2:37

[←107]
Jn. 19:37

[← 108]
Matt. 3:10

[← 109]
Matt. 7:16

[←110]
Matt. 12:33

[←111]
Hos. 7:12

[←112]
Hos. 5:13

[← 113]

Acts 15:9

[← 114]

1 Pet. 1:22

[←115]
Isa. 58:2-7

[←116]
2Cor. 7:1

[←117]
Rom, 1:26.

[←118]
2Cor. 12:7.

[←119]
Isa. 43:24.

[← 120]
Ps. 38:5

[←121]
Gen. 42:15

[← 122]

Ps. 77:1-6.

[← 123]
2Cor. 13:5

[← 124]

Deut. 29:19

[←125]
Matt. 3:7

[← 126]
2Kings 5:18.

[←127]
Jude 4.

[← 128]
Rom. 6:1, 2

[← 129]
Ps. 38:5

[← 130]

James 1:14, 15.

[←131]

A drunk man may not choose in his stupor to drive and run over a child, but he chooses to get drunk.

[← 132]
Gen 39:9

[← 133]
2Cor. 5:14

[← 134]
2Cor. 7:1

[← 135]
Gen. 4:7

[← 136]
Rom. 6:14

[←137]
Job 3:25

[← 138]
Isa. 63:17

[← 139]
Isa. 57:17

[← 140]

Mt. 17:21.

[←141]
2Kings 5:18.

[← 142]
Hos. 4:11

[← 143]

Prov. 7:7

[← 144]
Prov. 7:23

[← 145]
Hos. 7:11

[← 146]
Rom. 6:1, 2

[← 147]
Rev. 3:15-16

[← 148]
Heb. 3:12-13

[← 149]
Ps. 89:30-33

[← 150]
Isa. 57:17

[← 151]
Hos. 5:15

[← 152]
Heb. 3:12

[← 153]
Heb. 10:38

[← 154]
Gal. 6:8

[← 155]
Rom. 8:1

[← 156]
Eph. 4:25-30

[←157]
Lam. 3:33

[← 158]
Numb. 25:6

[← 159]
Heb. 6:6.

[← 160]

Jer. 6:29, 30.

[←161]
Ps. 51:3

[← 162]
2Cor. 7:11

[← 163]
Rom. 7:24

[← 164]
Eph. 6:8

[← 165]

Ps. 51:5.

[← 166]

That is, they could have strolled into hell instead of running headlong – Puritan humor.

[← 167]
1Cor. 9:27

[← 168]

1Pet. 4:13; 2Pet. 1:3, 4

[← 169]
Mark 13:37

[←170]
Luke 21:34

[←171]
Ps. 18:23

[←172]
Hag. 1:5, 7

[←173]
2Kings 8:9-13

[←174]

Jam. 1:14,15

[←175]
Job 42:5, 6

[←176]
Hab. 3:16

[←177]

Job 37:22.

[←178]
Isa. 40:12-25.

[←179]
Prov. 30:2-4

[← 180]

Exod. 34:5, 6

[←181]
Exod. 33:23

[← 182]

John 1:17-18

[← 183]

Heb. 1:2.

[←184]

Cant. 4:6.

[←185]

[NT:4383 prosopon - “front surface”]

[← 186]
2Cor 3:18

[←187]
1Cor. 13:12

[← 188]

1Cor. 13:11

[← 189]

1Cor. 13:12, 1 John 3:2

[← 190]

1 John 3:2

[←191]
1 Tim. 6:16

[← 192]
Prov. 30:2

[← 193]
Job 26:14

[← 194]

Heb. 11:6

[← 195]
2Cor. 5:7

[← 196]
Heb. 11:1

[← 197]
1Pet. 1:8

[← 198]

John 1:18

[← 199]

1 John 5:20

[←200]
2Cor. 4:4

[←201]
2Cor. 4:6

[←202]
Eph. 5:8

[←203]
2Cor. 3:18

[←204]

1 John 1:3

[←205]
Heb. 12:29

[←206]
Rom. 9:18

[←207]
Rom. 15:5

[←208]

Isa. 57:16-19

[←209]
Rev. 3:14

[←210]
Isa. 11:3

[←211]

1Kings 19:11

[←212]

Zech. 12:10

[←213]
Isa. 53:5

[←214]

Ezek. 16:60, 61

[←215]
2Cor. 7:11

[←216]
Job 42:6

[←217]
Job 33:14-30

[←218]

Ps. 78:36

[←219]
Ps. 78:37

[←220]

1 John 2:15.

[←221]
1Cor 3:15

[←222]
Isa. 57:21

[←223]

John 16:8.

[←224]
Isa. 55:7

[←225]
Hos. 14:4

[←226]

Hos. 9:9.

[←227]

Ps. 25:9.

[←228]

1Sam. 24:5.

[←229]

Ps. 130:6, 123:2.

[←230]
Isa. 8:17

[←231]
Isa. 28:16.

[←232]

2Kings 5:19.

[←233]
Micah 2:7

[←234]
Ps. 116:7

[←235]

Ps. 85. 8.

[←236]

Luke 22:32.

[←237]
Jer. 6:14

[←238]
Heb. 4:2

[←239]
Hab. 1:13

[←240]

Ps. 51:1.

[←241]
John 10:4

[←242]
Cant. 5:2

[←243]

Luke 24:32

[←244]

Cant. 5:4

[←245]

Phil. 4:13.

[←246]

Luke 15:17.

[←247]

John 1:16, Col. 1:19

[←248]

Isa. 40:28-31.

[←249]
Acts 5:31

[←250]
John 15:3

[←251]

Rom. 11:19, 20

[←252]

John 1:16; Matt. 28:18.

[←253]

Rom. 8:37.

[←254]
Isa. 40:27-31

[←255]
Isa. 35:7

[←256]
2Cor. 12:9

[←257]
Hab. 2:3

[←258]

Ps. 123:2.

[←259]

Isa. 7:9.

[←260]

John 6:68.

[←261]

John 15:2-5

[←262]
Col. 1:19

[←263]
John 1:16

[←264]

Col. 1:11.

[←265]
Eph. 3:16, 17

[←266]
Isa. 66:13

[←267]
Heb. 2:17, 18

[←268]

Heb. 4:15, 16

[←269]

Matt. 11:28.

[←270]

Isa. 55:1-3; Rev. 3:18

[←271]
Jer. 31:36

[←272]

Ps. 130:6.

[←273]
Ps. 9:10

[←274]
Tit. 2:14

[←275]
Eph. 5:25-27

[←276]

I John 1:7; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:5

[←277]
Heb. 9:14

[←278]

Owen, Communion with Christ, vol. II chapters 7-8

[←279]
Rom. 6:2

[←280]
Rom. 6:3

[←281]

Rom. 6:6

[←282]

Phil. 3:10; Col. 3:3; I Pet. 1:18, 19.

[←283]

Gal. 3:1; 1Cor. 15:3; I Pet. 1:18, 19, 5:1, 2; Col. 1:18, 14.

[←284]

John 16:8

[←285]
1Cor. 2:10

[←286]
2Cor. 1:21

[←287]
Eph. 3:16-18

[←288]
Zech. 12:10

[←289]
Rom. 8:26

[←290]

2Cor. 12:8.

[←291]

See Communion with God, Part 3, Chap. 6-8.