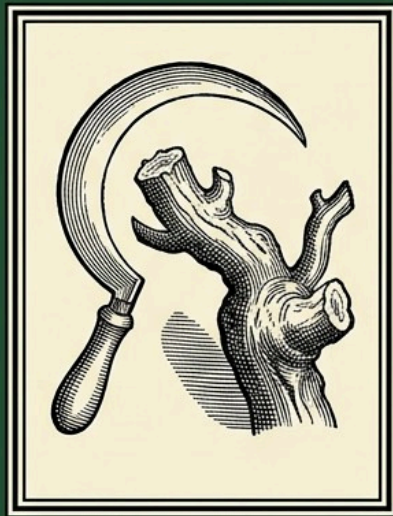


OF THE  
MORTIFICATION  
OF SIN IN  
BELIEVERS

JOHN OWEN



OF THE  
MORTIFICATION OF SIN  
IN BELIEVERS

*John Owen*



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## ABOUT THIS BOOK



A searching **Puritan treatise on mortification** grounded in Romans 8:13. Owen argues that only **Spirit-empowered believers** are called and equipped to wage war against indwelling sin — not the unregenerate, and not by self-invented disciplines. With pastoral urgency he dismantles Roman Catholic and moralistic approaches to self-denial, then offers concrete **directions for killing particular lusts**: examining symptoms, burdening the conscience, meditating on God's majesty, and drawing on Christ's death. A classic of **Reformed practical theology**.



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## TITLE PAGE



**O**n the mortification of sin in believers: 1. Its necessity, 2. Its nature, and 3. The means of accomplishing it.

With answers to various questions of conscience relating to this subject.

By John Owen, D.D., a servant of Jesus Christ in the work of the Gospel.

The third edition.

London, Printed for Nathanael Ponder, at the Peacock in the Poultry near Cornhill, and in Chancery Lane near Fleet Street, 1668.

## CHAPTER 1. THE FOUNDATION OF THE DISCOURSE IN ROMANS 8:13



**T**he foundation of the whole ensuing discourse laid in Romans 8:13. The words of the Apostle opened. The certain connection between true mortification and salvation. Mortification the work of believers. The Spirit the principal efficient cause of it. What meant by the body in the words of the Apostle. What by the deeds of the body. Life in what sense promised to this duty.

That what I have of direction to contribute to the carrying on of the work of mortification in believers, may receive order and perspicuity, I shall lay the foundation of it in those words of the Apostle, Romans 8:13. If you by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live; and reduce the whole to an improvement of the great evangelical truth and mystery contained in them.

The Apostle having made a recapitulation of his doctrine of justification by faith, and the blessed estate and condition of them who are made by grace partakers thereof (verses 1, 2, 3 of this chapter), proceeds to improve it, to the holiness and consolation of believers.

Among his arguments and motives unto holiness, the verse mentioned contains one, from the contrary events and effects of holiness and sin. If you live after the flesh, you shall die. What it is to live after the flesh, and what it is to die, that being not my present aim and business, I shall no otherwise explain, than as they will fall in with the sense of the latter words of the verse, as before proposed.

In the words peculiarly designed for the foundation of the ensuing discourse, there is:

1. A duty prescribed: Mortify the deeds of the body.
2. The persons are denoted to whom it is prescribed: You, if you mortify.
3. There is in them a promise annexed to that duty: You shall live.
4. The cause or means of the performance of this duty, the Spirit: If you through the Spirit.
5. The conditionality of the whole proposition, wherein duty, means, and promise, are contained: If you, etc.

The first thing occurring in the words, as they lie in the entire proposition, is the conditional note — but if. Conditionals in such propositions may denote two things.

1. The uncertainty of the event, or thing promised in respect of them to whom the duty is prescribed. And this takes place where the condition is absolutely necessary unto the issue, and depends not itself on any determinate cause, known to him to whom it is prescribed. So we say, If we live we will do such a thing. This can-

not be the intent of the conditional expression in this place. Of the persons to whom these words are spoken, it is said in verse 1 of the same chapter, there is no condemnation to them.

2. The certainty of the coherence and connection that is between the things spoken of. As we say to a sick man, If you will take such a potion, or use such a remedy, you will be well. The thing we solely intend to express, is the certainty of the connection that is between the potion or remedy, and health. And this is the use of it here. The certain connection that is between the mortifying of the deeds of the body, and living, is intimated in this conditional particle.

Now the connection and coherence of things being manifold, as of cause and effect, of way and means, and the end; this between mortification and life, is not of cause and effect properly and strictly, for eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). But of means and end: God has appointed this means, for the attaining that end, which he has freely promised. Means though necessary have a fair subordination to an end of free promise. A gift, and a procuring cause in him to whom it is given, are inconsistent. The intent then of this proposition as conditional, is, that there is a certain infallible connection and coherence between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that end; if you do mortify, you shall live. And herein lies the main motive unto, and enforcement of the duty prescribed.

2. The next thing we meet with in the words, is the persons to whom this duty is prescribed; and that is expressed in the word You, if you mortify: that is, you believers; you to whom there is no condemnation (verse 1); you that are not in the flesh, but in the

Spirit (verse 5); who are quickened by the Spirit of Christ (verses 10, 11). To you is this duty prescribed. The pressing of this duty immediately on any other, is a notable fruit of that superstition and self-righteousness that the world is full of — the great work and design of devout men, ignorant of the Gospel (Romans 10:3, 4; John 15:5). Now this description of the persons, in conjunction with the prescription of the duty, is the main foundation of the ensuing discourse, as it lies in this thesis or proposition.

The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days, to mortify the indwelling power of sin.

3. The principal efficient cause of the performance of this duty, is the Spirit: if by the Spirit. The Spirit here, is the Spirit mentioned verse 11, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, that dwells in us (verse 9), that quickens us (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 mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless, it must be done by the Spirit. Men, as the Apostle intimates (Romans 9:30-32), may attempt this work on other principles, by means and advantages administered on other accounts, as they always have done, and do; but this is the work of the Spirit, by him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about. Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world: and this is a second principle of my ensuing discourse.

4. The duty itself, mortify the deeds of the body, is next to be remarked.

Three things are here to be inquired into: 1. What is meant by the body. 2. What by the deeds of the body. 3. What by mortifying of them.

1. The body in the close of the verse, is the same with the flesh in the beginning. If you live after the flesh, you shall die, but if you mortify the deeds of the body; that is, of the flesh. It is that which the Apostle has all along discoursed of, under the name of the flesh, which is evident from the prosecution of the antithesis between the spirit and the flesh, before and after. The body then here is taken for that corruption and depravity of our natures, whereof the body in a great part is the seat and instrument: the very members of the body, being made servants unto unrighteousness thereby (Romans 6:19). It is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh, or lust that is intended. Many reasons might be given of this metonymical expression, that I shall not now insist on. The body here is the same with the old man, and the body of sin (Romans 6:6), or it may synecdochically express the whole person considered as corrupted, and the seat of lusts, and disordered affections.

2. The deeds of the body — the word indeed denotes the outward actions chiefly. The works of the flesh, as they are called (Galatians 5:19), which are there said to be manifest, and are enumerated. Now though the outward deeds are here only expressed, yet the inward and next causes are chiefly intended; the axe is to be laid to the root of the tree: the deeds of the flesh are to be mortified in their causes, from whence they spring. The Apostle calls them deeds, as that which every lust tends unto: though it do but conceive, and prove abortive, it aims to bring forth a perfect sin.

Having both in the seventh and the beginning of this chapter treated of indwelling lust and sin, as the fountain and principle of all sinful actions, he here mentions its destruction under the name of the effects which it does produce. The wisdom of the flesh, by a metonymy of the same nature with the former; or as the passions and lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:24), from whence the deeds and fruits of it do arise: and in this sense is the body used in verse 10. The body is dead because of sin.

3. To mortify — if you put to death: a metaphorical expression, taken from the putting of any living thing to death. To kill a man or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigor and power, so that he cannot act, or exert, or put forth any proper actings of his own; so it is in this case. Indwelling sin is compared to a person, a living person, called the old man, with his faculties, and properties, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, strength; this (says the Apostle) must be killed, put to death, mortified: that is, have its power, life, vigor and strength to produce its effects taken away by the Spirit. It is indeed meritoriously and by way of example utterly mortified and slain by the cross of Christ: and the old man is thence said to be crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), and ourselves to be dead with him (verse 8), and really, initially in regeneration (Romans 6:3-5), when a principle contrary to it, and destructive of it (Galatians 5:17), is planted in our hearts: but the whole work is by degrees to be carried on towards perfection all our days. Of this more in the process of our discourse.

The intent of the Apostle in this prescription of the duty mentioned, is, that the mortification of indwelling sin, remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring

forth the works or deeds of the flesh, is the constant duty of believers.

5. The promise unto this duty is life: you shall live. The life promised, is opposed to the death threatened in the clause foregoing: If you live after the flesh, you shall die; which the same Apostle elsewhere expresses: you shall of the flesh reap corruption (Galatians 6:8), or destruction from God. Now perhaps the word may not only intend eternal life, but also the spiritual life in Christ which here we have; not as to the essence and being of it, which is already enjoyed by believers, but as to the joy, comfort, and vigor of it: as the Apostle says in another case, Now I live if you stand fast (1 Thessalonians 3:8). Now my life will do me good; I shall have joy and comfort with my life: you shall live, lead a good, vigorous, comfortable, spiritual life while you are here, and obtain eternal life hereafter.

Supposing what was said before of the connection between mortification and eternal life, as of means and end, I shall add only as a second motive to the duty prescribed, that:

The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life, depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.

## CHAPTER 2. THE NECESSITY OF MORTIFICATION



**T**he entire discourse is grounded in Romans 8:13. The apostle's words are explained. There is a certain connection between true mortification and salvation. Mortification is the work of believers. The Spirit is its principal efficient cause. What the apostle means by 'the body' is examined. What he means by 'the deeds of the body' is considered. The sense in which life is promised to this duty is clarified.

To give order and clarity to what I have to offer on the work of mortification in believers, I will lay its foundation in the apostle's words in Romans 8:13: 'If you by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.' My aim throughout is to draw out the rich evangelical truth and mystery contained in that verse.

After summarizing his doctrine of justification by faith and the blessed condition of those who receive it by grace (Romans 8:1-3), the apostle moves on to apply it to the holiness and comfort of believers.

Among his arguments and motivations for holiness, the verse in question presents one argument drawn from the opposite outcomes of holiness and sin. He states: 'If you live after the flesh, you

shall die.' Since explaining what it means to live after the flesh and what it means to die is not my present aim, I will address those only as they connect with the meaning of the latter part of the verse.

In the words selected as the foundation of this discourse, there are several elements:

1. A duty prescribed: mortify the deeds of the body.
2. The persons to whom it is prescribed are identified: 'You, if you mortify.'
3. A promise is attached to that duty: 'You shall live.'
4. The cause or means of performing this duty is identified as the Spirit: 'If you through the Spirit.'
5. The conditional nature of the whole statement, containing duty, means, and promise: 'If you,' etc.

The first thing we encounter in the words as they stand in the full statement is the conditional word — 'but if.' Conditional statements of this kind can point to two things.

1. The uncertainty of the promised outcome for the people addressed — where the condition is absolutely necessary for the result, and itself depends on no fixed cause known to those addressed. For example, we say, 'If we live, we will do such a thing.' This cannot be what the conditional means here. Of the persons addressed, it is already said in verse 1 of the same chapter that there is no condemnation for them.

2. The certainty of the connection between the things being discussed. It is like saying to a sick man, 'If you take this medicine, you will recover.' What we mean is simply that there is a certain

connection between the medicine and health. That is how the conditional is used here. The conditional word signals the certain connection between mortifying the deeds of the body and living.

Now, connections between things take various forms — cause and effect, means and end, and so on. The connection between mortification and life is not one of cause and effect in a strict sense, because eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). It is rather a connection of means and end: God has appointed this means for attaining the end He has freely promised. Means, though necessary, are properly subordinate to an end that comes by free promise. A gift and a cause that earns it are mutually exclusive. The intent of this conditional statement, then, is that there is a certain, unfailing connection between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you will obtain that end; if you do mortify, you shall live. This is the main motivation and driving force of the duty prescribed.

2. The next element is the persons to whom this duty is prescribed, expressed in the word 'you' — 'if you mortify'; that is, you believers, you to whom there is no condemnation (verse 1), you who are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (verse 5), who are quickened by the Spirit of Christ (verses 10-11). This duty is prescribed to you. Pressing this duty directly on anyone else reflects the widespread superstition and self-righteousness that permeates the world — the great project of devout people who are ignorant of the Gospel (Romans 10:3-4; John 15:5). This description of the persons addressed, together with the prescription of the duty, forms the main foundation of the discussion that follows, as it is expressed in this thesis.

The choicest believers — those who are certainly freed from the condemning power of sin — ought still to make the mortification of sin's indwelling power the work of all their days.

## CHAPTER 3. THE SPIRIT THE ONLY AUTHOR OF MORTIFICATION



**T**he principal assertion about the necessity of mortification is proposed for confirmation. Mortification is the duty of the best believers (Colossians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 9:27). Indwelling sin always remains; there is no perfection in this life (Philippians 3:12; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Peter 3:18; Galatians 5:17; etc.). The activity of indwelling sin in believers (Romans 7:23; James 4:5; Hebrews 12:1) is examined. Its fruitfulness and tendency are considered. Every lust aims at the fullest expression of its kind. The Spirit and the new nature are given to contend against indwelling sin (Galatians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4-5; Romans 7:23). The fearful outcome of neglecting mortification (Revelation 3:2; Hebrews 3:13) is considered. The first general principle of this entire discourse is confirmed from these truths. Grief over the lack of this duty is expressed.

Having laid this foundation, a brief confirmation of the principal conclusions stated above will lead me into what I chiefly intend. The first is:

The choicest believers — those who are certainly freed from the condemning power of sin — ought still to make the mortification of sin's indwelling power the work of all their days.

So the apostle writes (Colossians 3:5): 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.' Who is he speaking to? Those who were risen with Christ (verse 1), those who were dead with Him (verse 3), those whose life Christ was, and who would appear with Him in glory (verse 4). Keep mortifying; make it your daily work; be always at it while you live; do not cease from this work for a single day. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you. Being virtually dead with Christ, being quickened with Him, does not excuse you from this work. Our Savior also tells us how His Father deals with every branch in Him that bears fruit — every true and living branch: He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit (John 15:2). He prunes it not for a day or two, but throughout its entire life in this world. The apostle also tells us what his own practice was (1 Corinthians 9:27): 'I discipline my body and make it my slave.' He did it daily; it was the work of his life; he never omitted it; it was his business. If this was the work and business of Paul — who was so incomparably advanced in grace, light, revelations, spiritual experiences, privileges, and consolations beyond the ordinary measure of believers — where in this world can any of us possibly find an exemption from this work and duty? A brief account of the reasons for this may be given.

1. Indwelling sin always remains while we are in this world; therefore it must always be mortified. The foolish and ignorant disputes of people about perfectly keeping God's commands, about achieving perfection in this life, about being entirely and completely dead to sin — I will not address them here. It is more than

likely that those who hold such views have never understood what it means to keep even one of God's commands. They fall so far short of a perfection of degrees that they have never even attained a perfection of parts — that is, universal obedience in sincerity. Hence, many in our day who have spoken of perfection have been 'wiser' in their own way, claiming it consists in knowing no difference between good and evil. Not that they are perfect in what we call good, but that everything is the same to them — and the height of wickedness is their perfection. Others have found a new path to it by denying original indwelling sin and softening the spirituality of God's law to suit carnal hearts. In doing so, they have shown themselves to be ignorant of the life of Christ and of His power in believers, and they have invented a new kind of righteousness the Gospel does not know — inflated by their fleshly minds. As for us, who dare not be wiser than what is written or boast through others' experiences of what God has not done for us, we say that indwelling sin lives in us to some measure and degree while we are in this world. We dare not speak as though we had already attained or were already perfect (Philippians 3:12). Our inner person is being renewed day by day as long as we live here (2 Corinthians 4:16), and the renewal of the new corresponds to the decay of the old. While we are here, we know only in part (1 Corinthians 13:12), with a remaining darkness that is to be gradually removed by our growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). The flesh desires against the Spirit so that we cannot do the things we want to (Galatians 5:17), and we are therefore defective in obedience as well as in understanding (1 John 1:8). We carry a body of death (Romans 7:24) from which we are not delivered until the death of these bodies (Philippians 3:21). Since our duty is to mor-

tify — to be killing sin — while sin remains in us, we must be at work. The man assigned to kill an enemy who stops fighting before the enemy stops living has only done half his work (Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 12:1; 2 Corinthians 7:1).

2. Sin does not only remain in us — it is always active, always laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin leaves us alone, we may leave sin alone. But sin is never less active than when it appears most quiet. Its waters run deepest when they are still. Our efforts against it must match that — vigorous at all times and in all conditions, especially where there is least suspicion. Sin does not only remain in us; the law of the members is always rebelling against the law of the mind (Romans 7:23), and the spirit that dwells in us desires intensely (James 4:5). It is always at work: the flesh desires against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). Lust is always tempting and conceiving sin (James 1:14). In every moral action, it is always either inclining toward evil, hindering from good, or unsettling the spirit from communion with God. It inclines toward evil: 'The evil that I would not, that I do,' says the apostle (Romans 7:19) — because in him, that is, in his flesh, nothing good dwells. It also hinders from good: 'The good that I would do, that I do not' (verse 19) — on the same account, either I do not do it at all, or not as I should; all my holy deeds being defiled by this sin. The flesh desires against the Spirit so that we cannot do what we would (Galatians 5:17), and it unsettles our spirit. This is why it is called 'the sin which so easily entangles us' (Hebrews 12:1), and this is the source of the apostle's bitter complaints about it (Romans 7). So sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he ever had any dealings with God or did anything for God, in which indwelling sin did not

have a hand in corrupting what he did? Sin will carry on this work more or less all our days. If sin is always acting, and we are not always mortifying it, we are lost. A man who stands still and lets his enemy rain down blows on him without resistance will certainly be defeated in the end. If sin is subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work trying to kill our souls, and we are lazy, negligent, and careless in pursuing its ruin — what outcome can we expect? Not a day passes but sin either soils us or is overcome; either it prevails or is prevailed against. And so it will be as long as we live in this world. I would release a man from this duty only if he could bring sin to a truce — a complete ceasefire. If sin will spare him for a single day, in a single duty (provided he is someone who understands the spirituality of obedience and the subtlety of sin), let him say to his soul: 'Rest now.' The saints, whose souls long for deliverance from sin's troubling rebellion, know there is no safety from it except in constant warfare.

3. Sin will not only strive, act, rebel, trouble, and disturb — if left alone and not continually mortified, it will produce great, wicked, scandalous, soul-destroying sins. The apostle tells us what its works and fruits are (Galatians 5:19-21): 'The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.' You know what it did in David and many others. Sin always aims at the utmost. Every time it rises to tempt or entice, if it could have its own way, it would go out to the most extreme expression of that sin. Every impure thought or glance would become adultery if it could. Every covetous desire would become oppression. Every thought of unbelief would become atheism, if it

were allowed to run its course. A man may reach a point where sin seems to speak no obviously scandalous word in his heart — that is, it may not openly urge him toward great and flagrant sin. But every rising of lust, if given free course, would arrive at the deepest villainy. It is like the grave, which is never satisfied. This is no small part of the deceitfulness of sin, by which it prevails to harden people and bring them to ruin (Hebrews 3:13). Sin is modest, so to speak, in its first motions and proposals. But once it has gained a foothold in the heart through them, it consistently holds and presses forward to some further degree of the same kind. This fresh advance keeps the soul from noticing how far it has already drifted from God. The soul thinks all is reasonably well as long as there is no further progress. And to whatever degree the soul becomes insensitive to any sin — that is, without the sense the Gospel requires — to that degree it is hardened. Yet sin always presses forward, because it has no limit except the complete rejection of God and opposition to Him. The fact that it advances toward its full height by degrees, consolidating ground gained through hardness, is not the nature of sin but its deceitfulness. Nothing can prevent this but mortification. Mortification withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that whatever sin aims at, it is blocked. There is not the best saint in the world who, if he were to abandon this duty, would not fall into sins as terrible as any of his kind ever committed.

4. One main reason the Spirit and the new nature are given to us is so that we may have an inward principle to oppose sin and lust. The flesh desires against the Spirit — but what then? The Spirit also desires against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). The Spirit, or spiritual new nature, has a propensity to act against the flesh, just

as the flesh has a propensity to act against the Spirit. Similarly, our participation in the divine nature enables us to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:4-5), and there is a law of the mind as well as a law of the members (Romans 7:23). Now two things are clear: (1) It is the most unjust and unreasonable thing in the world to bind one combatant and prevent him from doing his best, while leaving the other free to wound him at will. (2) It is the most foolish thing in the world to restrain the one who fights for our eternal welfare, while setting free the one who seeks and violently pursues our everlasting ruin. The contest is for our lives and souls. Failing to daily employ the Spirit and the new nature in mortifying sin is to neglect the excellent help God has given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to use what we have received, God may justly withhold His hand from giving us more. His graces, like His gifts, are given to us to be used, exercised, and put to work. Failing daily to mortify sin is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has equipped us with the very principle for doing it.

5. Neglecting this duty puts the soul in a condition exactly opposite to what the apostle describes in himself (2 Corinthians 4:16): 'Though our outward man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day.' In the negligent person, the inner man decays while the outward man is renewed day by day. Sin is like the house of David, and grace like the house of Saul. Exercise and success are the two main nourishers of grace in the heart. When grace is left to sit idle, it withers and decays. The things of it become ready to die (Revelation 3:2), and sin gains ground toward hardening the heart (Hebrews 3:13). This is what I mean: when this duty is omitted, grace withers, lust flourishes, and the condi-

tion of the heart grows worse and worse — and the Lord knows what desperate and fearful outcomes this has had for many. Where sin, through neglect of mortification, gains a significant victory, it breaks the bones of the soul (Psalm 31:10; Psalm 51:8) and makes a person weak, sick, and near death (Psalm 38:3-5), so that he cannot look up (Psalm 40:12; Isaiah 33:24). When people take blow after blow, wound after wound, defeat after defeat, and never rouse themselves to vigorous resistance — can they expect anything but to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, their souls bleeding toward death (2 John 8)? It is a sad thing to consider the fearful outcomes of this neglect, which we see before our eyes every day. Do we not see those we once knew as humble, tender-hearted, broken Christians — careful not to offend, zealous for God and all His ways, His Sabbaths and ordinances — now grown, through neglect of watchfulness in this duty, earthly, cold, worldly, wrathful, conforming to the world, to the scandal of religion and the fearful discouragement of all who know them? The truth is, between placing mortification in a rigid, hardened spirit — which is for the most part earthly, legalistic, harsh, partial, and consistent with wrath, envy, malice, and pride on the one hand — and pretenses of liberty, grace, and the like on the other, true evangelical mortification is almost lost among us. More on this later.

6. It is our duty to be perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1), to be growing in grace every day (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18), and to be renewing our inner person day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). None of this can be done without the daily mortification of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness and against every degree of growth. Let no one think he makes any progress in holiness who does not walk over the back of his lusts.

He who does not kill sin in his way takes no steps toward his journey's end. He who finds no opposition from sin and does not specifically set himself to mortify it is at peace with it, not dying to it.

This then is the first general principle of our discussion: despite the meritorious mortification (if I may use that term) of all sin accomplished in the cross of Christ, and despite the real foundation of total mortification laid in our first conversion through conviction of sin, humiliation for sin, and the planting of a new principle that opposes and destroys sin — still, sin so remains, so acts, and so works in the best of believers while they live in this world, that constant daily mortification is their duty every day of their lives. Before I move to the next principle, I must pause to lament the condition of many professing Christians today, who — instead of bearing such great and evident fruits of mortification as we might expect — barely show so much as a leaf. A broad light has fallen on the people of this generation, and many spiritual gifts have been given alongside it. Together with other factors, these have wonderfully expanded the boundaries of who professes faith — both the people and the profession have multiplied greatly. Hence there is a noise of religion and religious duties in every corner. Preaching abounds, and that not in the empty, trivial, and vain manner of former times, but with considerable spiritual gift — so that if you measured the number of believers by light, gifts, and profession, the church might well say, 'Who has borne me all these?' But if you take the measure of that number by this great distinguishing grace of Christians — mortification — you will perhaps find the number not so large. Where is the professing Christian today, who owes his conversion to this era of light, and

who speaks and professes at such a level of spirituality as few in former times knew anything of — yet does not give evidence of a miserably unmortified heart? (I will not judge them, but perhaps they boast of what the Lord has done in them.) If vanity in spending time, idleness, unproductiveness in one's calling, envy, strife, quarreling, jealousy, wrath, pride, worldliness, and selfishness (1 Corinthians 1) are the marks of Christians, we have them in abundance on us and among us. And if this is the condition of those who have much light — which we hope is saving — what shall we say of some who wish to be considered religious, yet despise the light of the Gospel? As for the duty at hand, they know no more of it than what consists in occasionally denying themselves some outward comfort — which is one of the outermost branches of mortification, and even that they will seldom practice. May the good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our spiritual sickness, or we are in a desperate condition.

Two evils certainly attend every unmortified professing Christian — one in himself, and the other in relation to others.

1. In himself, whatever he may claim, he has a low view of sin — at least of the sins of daily life. The root of an unmortified life is the digesting of sin without any bitterness in the heart. When a man has shaped his thinking about grace and mercy in such a way that he can swallow and absorb daily sins without sorrow, that man stands at the very edge of turning the grace of God into license and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. There is no greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world than to live this way. To use the blood of Christ — which is given to cleanse us (1 John 1:7; Titus 2:14), the exaltation of Christ — which is to give us repentance (Acts 5:31), and the doctrine of grace — which

teaches us to deny all ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12) — to justify sin is a rebellion that will, in the end, break the bones. Most of the professing Christians who have apostatized in our time went out through this door. For a while, most of them were under conviction, and those convictions kept them to duties and brought them to profession. In this way, they escaped the corruptions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 2:20). But having become familiar with the doctrine of the Gospel, and growing weary of duties for which they had no inner principle, they began to excuse their many negligences on the grounds of grace. Once this evil took hold of them, they quickly tumbled into ruin.

2. It has an evil influence on others in two ways.

1. It hardens them by producing in them the persuasion that they are in as good a condition as the best professing Christians. Whatever others see in these unmortified professors is so tainted by the lack of mortification that it carries no weight. They show zeal for religion, but paired with a lack of patience and universal righteousness. They refuse extravagance, but are worldly. They separate from the world, but live entirely for themselves, showing no care for loving-kindness in the world. Or they talk spiritually and live carelessly. They speak of communion with God while being completely conformed to the world. They boast of forgiveness of sins while never forgiving others. With such examples, poor souls harden their hearts in their unregenerate state.

2. They deceive others by making them believe that if they can reach the same condition, all will be well with them. This makes the great temptation of religious reputation easy to fall into. A per-

son may go far beyond them in outward appearance and yet come short of eternal life. But these things, along with all the evils of unmortified living, will be addressed later.

Question: How does the Spirit mortify sin?

I answer, in general three ways.

1. By causing our hearts to abound in grace, and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the principles of them. So the Apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh, and of the Spirit: The fruits of the flesh (says he) are so and so (Galatians 5:19, 20), but the fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary, quite of another sort (verses 22, 23). Those that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts — but how? By living in the Spirit, and walking after the Spirit (verse 25): that is, by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. For these are contrary one to another (verse 17), so that they cannot both be in the same subject, in any intense or high degree. This renewing of us by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) is one great way of mortification: he causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet, or thriving of indwelling sin itself.

2. By a real, physical efficiency on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying and taking it away. Hence he is called a Spirit of judgment and burning (Isaiah 4:4), really consuming and destroying our lusts. He takes away the stony heart by an almighty efficiency; for as he begins the work as to its kind, so he carries it on as to its degrees. 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, and gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship in his sufferings; of the manner whereof more afterwards.

Question: If this be the work of the Spirit alone, how is it, that we are exhorted to it? Seeing the Spirit of God only can do it, let the work be left wholly to him.

Answer: 1. It is no otherwise the work of the Spirit, but as all graces and good works which are in us, are his: he works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). He works all our works in us (Isaiah 26:12); the work of faith with power (2 Thessalonians 1:11; Colossians 2:12). He causes us to pray, and is a Spirit of supplication (Romans 8:26; Zechariah 12:10); and yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted to all these.

2. He does not so work our mortification in us, as not to keep it still an act of our obedience. The Holy Spirit works in us, and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in, and upon, that is, so as to preserve our own liberty, and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us, and with us, not against us, or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement, as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself. And indeed I might here lament the endless foolish labor of poor souls, who being convinced of sin, and not able to stand against the power of their convictions, do set themselves by innumerable perplexing ways and duties to keep down sin, but being strangers to the Spirit of God, all in vain. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days. They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which profits not.

This is the saddest warfare that any poor creature can be engaged in; a soul under the power of conviction from the law, is pressed to fight against sin, but has no strength for the combat. They cannot but fight, and they can never conquer, they are like men thrust on the sword of enemies, on purpose to be slain. The law drives them on, and sin beats them back. Sometimes they think indeed that they have foiled sin; when they have only raised a dust, that they see it not; that is, they distemper their natural affections of fear, sorrow, and anguish, which makes them believe that sin is conquered, when it is not touched. By that time they are cold, they must to the battle again; and the lust which they thought to be slain, appears to have had no wound.

And if the case be so sad with them who do labor and strive, and yet enter not into the kingdom; what is their condition who despise all this? Who are perpetually under the power and dominion of sin, and love to have it so: and are troubled at nothing but that they cannot make sufficient provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

## CHAPTER 4. THE USEFULNESS OF MORTIFICATION



**T**he second general principle, concerning the means of mortification, is proposed for confirmation. The Spirit is the only author of this work. The emptiness of Roman Catholic mortification is exposed. Many means they use were never appointed by God for this purpose. Those that were appointed by God are abused by them. The mistakes of others in this matter are also examined. The Spirit is promised to believers for this work (Ezekiel 11:19; chapter 36:26). Everything we receive from Christ comes to us through the Spirit. How the Spirit mortifies sin (Galatians 5:19-23) is explained. The various ways of His working toward this end are set out. How His work and our duty relate is considered.

The next principle concerns the supreme and sovereign cause of the mortification we are treating — which, in the words laid as the foundation of this discourse, is said to be the Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, as was shown.

He alone is sufficient for this work. All methods and means apart from Him are as nothing, for He is the great efficient cause of mortification, working in us as He pleases.

1. People seek other remedies in vain; those remedies will not heal them. The many ways that have been prescribed for mortifying sin are well known. The greater part of Roman Catholic religion — that portion which looks most like genuine religion in their practice — consists of mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretense of their rough garments by which they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, and penances are all built on this foundation: they are all aimed at mortifying sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotion all look in this direction. Those who interpret the locusts that came out of the pit (Revelation 9:2) as the friars of the Roman Church — who are said to torment men so that they seek death but cannot find it (verse 6) — believe they did this through their stinging sermons. These sermons convicted people of sin but could not point to the remedy for healing or mortifying it, and so kept people in perpetual anguish and terror, longing to die. This, I say, is the substance and glory of their religion. But between their laboring to mortify people who are spiritually dead, their ignorance of the nature and purpose of the work, and the poison they mix into it — their claim to merit — their glory is their shame. But more on them and their mortification later.

That the ways and means invented by them for mortifying sin are still urged and prescribed for the same purpose by some who should know the Gospel better is well known. Such directions for this purpose have recently been given by some, and eagerly received by others who call themselves Protestants — directions that would have suited Roman Catholic devotion three or four centuries ago. Such outward efforts, bodily exercises, self-performed acts, and purely legal duties — with no mention whatsoever of Christ or His Spirit — are dressed up in inflated language as the

only means and methods for mortifying sin. They reveal a deep-seated unfamiliarity with the power of God and the mystery of the Gospel. This was one motivation for publishing this plain and direct discourse.

The reasons why Roman Catholics can never truly mortify any sin through all their efforts include the following:

1. Because many of the ways and means they employ for this purpose were never appointed by God for it. Nothing in religion has any power to accomplish an end unless God appointed it for that purpose. Things like their rough garments, vows, penances, disciplines, and monastic life fall into this category. About all of these God will say, 'Who required these things from you?' and 'In vain do you worship Me, teaching human traditions as if they were commands from God.' Various self-imposed afflictions urged by others fall into the same category.

2. Because the things that God has appointed as means are not used by them in their proper place and order. Prayer, fasting, watching, meditation, and similar practices have their proper use in this work. But they treat these streams as if they were the fountain. These means accomplish the end only as instruments subordinate to the Spirit and to faith — yet Roman Catholics look to them as if they work by the virtue of the act itself. If they fast so much, pray so much, and keep their hours and schedules, the work is done. As the apostle says of some in another context, they are always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. So these are always mortifying but never arrive at any real mortification. In short, they have various means to discipline the natural man as to his natural life here, but none to mortify lust or corruption.

This is the general mistake of people who are ignorant of the Gospel on this matter, and it lies at the root of much of the superstition and self-willed worship that has been brought into the world. What dreadful self-tortures were practiced by some of the early founders of monastic devotion? What violence did they do to nature? What extreme suffering did they inflict on themselves? Search their ways and principles to the bottom, and you will find one root: in attempting rigid mortification, they fell upon the natural man instead of the corrupt old man — upon the body in which we live rather than the body of death.

The natural religious tendency found in others will not do it either. When people are stung by the guilt of a sin that has overcome them, they instantly promise themselves and God that they will never do it again. They watch themselves and pray for a season — until the heat cools and the sense of sin fades, and so the effort at mortification fades with it, and sin returns to its former dominance. Religious duties are excellent food for a healthy soul; they are no medicine for a sick one. A man who turns his food into his medicine should not expect much effect from either. Spiritually sick people cannot sweat out their sickness through striving. But this is the way of people who deceive their own souls, as we shall see later.

That none of these ways are sufficient is clear from the very nature of the work to be done. It requires such a complex of concurrent actions that no self-effort can reach it. It is the kind of work that requires almighty power for its accomplishment, as will be demonstrated later.

This work, then, belongs to the Spirit.

1. He is promised by God to be given to us for this very work. The removal of the stony heart — that is, the stubborn, proud, rebellious, unbelieving heart — is in general the work of mortification we are treating. This is precisely what is promised to be done by the Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19; Ezekiel 36:26). 'I will give My Spirit, and take away the stony heart.' This work is accomplished by the Spirit of God, even when all other means fail (Isaiah 57:17-18).

2. All our mortification comes from what Christ gives us, and everything Christ gives us comes to us through the Spirit of Christ. Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Every supply and resource He provides — whether in the beginning, increase, or exercise of any grace — comes from Him by the Spirit, through whom alone He works in and upon believers. Our mortification comes from Him: He is exalted and made both Prince and Savior to give repentance to us (Acts 5:31), and mortification is no small part of that repentance. How does He do it? Having received the promise of the Holy Spirit, He sends Him out for that very purpose (Acts 2:33).

Briefly addressing one or two questions will bring me closer to my main purpose.

The first question is:

Question: How does the Spirit mortify sin?

The answer, in general, is: in three ways.

1. By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh and to the principles of the flesh. The apostle sets the fruits of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit in contrast: 'The fruits of the flesh are such and such,' he says (Galatians 5:19-20), 'but the fruits of the Spirit are quite different — of an en-

tirely different kind' (verses 22-23). Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires — but how? By living in the Spirit and walking according to the Spirit (verse 25): that is, by the growing abundance of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking in step with them. For these are opposed to one another (verse 17), so that both cannot exist together in the same person in any intense or high degree. This renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) is one great means of mortification: He causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces that are directly contrary, opposed, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh and to the health and vigor of indwelling sin itself.

## CHAPTER 5. WHAT IT IS TO MORTIFY SIN



**T**he final principle: the usefulness of mortification. The vigor and comfort of our spiritual life depend on our mortification. In what sense — not absolutely and necessarily (Psalm 88; Heman's condition). Not as the next and immediate cause. As a means: by removing what is contrary. The desperate effects of an unmortified lust: it weakens the soul (Psalm 38:3, 8) in various ways and darkens it. All graces are strengthened by the mortification of sin. Mortification is the best evidence of sincerity.

The final principle I will address — setting aside for now 1. the necessity of mortification for life, and 2. the certainty of life through mortification — is this:

The life, vigor, and comfort of our spiritual life depend greatly on our mortification of sin.

Strength, comfort, power, and peace in our walk with God are what our souls desire. If any of us were asked honestly what troubles us, it would come down to one of two things: either we lack strength, power, and vitality in our obedience and walk with God, or we lack peace, comfort, and consolation in it. Whatever troubles

a believer that does not belong to one of these two heads is not worth dwelling on in our complaints. Both of these depend greatly on a consistent practice of mortification. Consider the following:

1. I do not say they flow from mortification as if they were necessarily tied to it. A man may live a consistent life of mortification all his days and yet perhaps never enjoy a good day of peace and consolation. Such was the case with Heman (Psalm 88). His life was one of perpetual mortification and walking with God, yet terrors and wounds were his portion all his days. But God singled out Heman — a choice friend — to make him an example for all who would afterward be in distress. Can you complain if your own experience is no different from that of Heman, that eminent servant of God? His story will be his praise to the end of the world. God declares it His own prerogative to speak peace and consolation (Isaiah 57:18-19): 'I will comfort him,' says God — but how? By an immediate act of new creation: 'I create it,' says God. Using the means for obtaining peace is our responsibility; bestowing it is God's prerogative.

2. Among the means God has appointed to give us life, vigor, courage, and consolation, mortification is not itself the immediate cause of these things. The privileges of our adoption, made known to our souls, are what immediately produce these things. The Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God — giving us a new name and a white stone — adoption and justification understood as to our sense and knowledge of them, are the immediate causes (in the Spirit's hand) of these things. But this is what I affirm:

3. In our ordinary walk with God, and in God's ordinary dealings with us, the vigor and comfort of our spiritual life depend greatly on our mortification — not only as a necessary condition but as something that has a real and effective influence on it.

First, mortification alone keeps sin from robbing us of both life and comfort. 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) It weakens the soul and strips it of strength. When David had harbored an unmortified lust in his heart for a time, it broke all his bones and left him with no spiritual strength. He complained of being sick, weak, wounded, and faint: 'There is no soundness in me' (Psalm 38:3); 'I am feeble and severely broken' (verse 8); 'I cannot so much as look up' (Psalm 40:12). An unmortified lust will drain the spirit and all the vitality of the soul, leaving it weak for all duties.

1. It throws the heart itself into disorder by entangling its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual condition required for vigorous communion with God. It takes hold of the affections, making its object seem lovable and desirable, and so expels the love of the Father (1 John 2:1; 3:17). The soul can no longer say sincerely and truly to God, 'You are my portion,' because something else has captured its love. Fear, desire, and hope — the primary affections of the soul, which should be full of God — will be entangled with it one way or another.

2. It fills the thoughts with schemes around it. Thoughts are the great providers of the soul, bringing in resources to satisfy its affections. If sin remains unmortified in the heart, the thoughts must constantly be making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. They must gloss over, adorn, and dress up the objects of the flesh and bring them home to give satisfaction. This they can accomplish in the service of a corrupt imagination beyond all description.

3. It breaks out and actively hinders duty. The ambitious man must be scheming, the worldly man must be working or contriving, and the sensual or vain person must be pursuing pleasure when they should be engaged in the worship of God.

If it were my current purpose to set forth the damage, ruin, weakness, and devastation that one unmortified lust will bring upon a soul, this discussion would need to extend far beyond my intended scope.

(2) As sin weakens, so it darkens the soul. It is a cloud — a thick cloud — that spreads itself over the face of the soul and blocks all the beams of God's love and favor. It takes away all sense of the privileges of our adoption. When the soul begins to gather thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them. More on this later.

In this respect, the vigor and power of our spiritual life depend on mortification. It is the only means of removing what robs us of both. People who are sick and wounded under the power of lust try many remedies. They cry out to God when the confusion of their thoughts overwhelms them. They cry to God but are not delivered.

They try many remedies in vain and are not healed (Hosea 5:13). People may recognize their sickness and wounds, but if they do not apply the right treatment, they will not be cured.

Second, mortification prunes all God's graces and makes room for them to grow in our hearts. The life and vigor of our spiritual lives consist in the vitality and flourishing of the graces planted in our hearts. Consider a garden: plant a precious herb, leave the ground untended, and let weeds grow around it. The herb may survive, but it will be a poor, withering, useless thing. You have to search carefully to find it, and when you do, you can barely recognize it. Even if you identify it, you can make no use of it at all. Now plant another of the same kind in ground that is naturally just as poor and barren — but keep it well weeded, with everything noxious and harmful removed. It flourishes and thrives. You can see it the moment you enter the garden, and you can use it whenever you like. This is how it is with the graces of the Spirit planted in our hearts. They survive in a heart where mortification is neglected, but they are ready to die (Revelation 3:2) — withering and decaying. The heart is like the sluggard's field, so overgrown with weeds you can barely see the good grain. Such a person may search for faith, love, and zeal and barely find them. Even if he discovers that these graces are still there — alive and genuine — they are so weak and so burdened with lusts that they are of very little use. But let the heart be cleansed through mortification — the weeds of lust constantly and daily uprooted as they spring up daily, for our nature is their natural soil — and room is made for grace to thrive and flourish. Then every grace will perform its part and be ready for every use and purpose.

Third, concerning our peace: just as there is no solid evidence of sincerity without mortification, I know of nothing that provides such strong evidence of sincerity as mortification. That sincerity is no small foundation of our peace. Mortification is the soul's vigorous opposition to itself — and it is in this opposition that sincerity is most clearly seen.

Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.

For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.

I do not doubt, but that when they sought, and returned, and inquired early after God, they did it with full purpose of heart, as to the relinquishment of their sins: it is expressed in the word returned. To turn or return to the Lord, is by a relinquishment of sin. This they did early, with earnestness, and diligence; but yet their sin was unmortified for all this (verses 36, 37); and this is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction; and a great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves, lies oftentimes herein.

These and many other ways there are, whereby poor souls deceive themselves, and suppose they have mortified their lusts, when they live and are mighty, and on every occasion break forth to their disturbance and disquietness.

## CHAPTER 6. THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN IN PARTICULAR



**T**he principal intent of the whole discourse is stated. The first main case of conscience is posed. What it means to mortify any sin is considered negatively. It is not the utter destruction of sin in this life. It is not the concealing of sin. It is not the improvement of any natural tendency. It is not the diversion of sin. It is not an occasional conquest. Occasional conquests of sin — what they are and when they occur. One occurs upon the eruption of sin in times of danger or trouble.

With these foundations in place, I come to my principal purpose: to address some practical questions that arise in the work of mortifying sin in believers. The first question is the main one, to which all the others relate, and it may be posed as follows.

Suppose a man is a true believer, yet finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin that is leading him captive to its law — consuming his heart with trouble, perplexing his thoughts, weakening his soul for communion with God, disturbing his peace, and perhaps defiling his conscience and exposing him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin. What should he do? What course should he take and maintain, for the mortification of this sin, lust, disorder,

or corruption — to such a degree that, though it is not utterly destroyed, he may in his struggle with it be enabled to maintain power, strength, and peace in communion with God?

In answering this important question, I will do the following.

1. Show what it means to mortify any sin — both negatively and positively — so that we are not mistaken at the foundation.

2. Give general directions concerning things without which it will be utterly impossible for anyone to truly and spiritually mortify any sin.

3. Lay out the specific steps by which this is to be done — keeping in mind throughout that I am treating not mortification in general, but only as it relates to the particular case just posed.

1. To mortify a sin is not to utterly kill, root out, and destroy it so that it no longer has any hold or residence in our hearts. This is indeed what is aimed at, but it cannot be fully accomplished in this life. No one who truly sets himself to mortify any sin fails to aim at its complete destruction — that it would leave neither root nor fruit in his heart or life. He would kill it so thoroughly that it would never move or stir again, never cry out or call, seduce or tempt, to all eternity. Now although a wonderful degree of victory over any sin can certainly be attained through the Spirit and grace of Christ — so much so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it — its utter killing and complete destruction so that it simply ceases to be is not to be expected in this life. Paul assures us of this (Philippians 3:12): 'Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect.' He was a choice saint, a pattern for believers, without equal in faith and love and all the fruits of the Spirit. On that basis he could even speak of perfection in comparison with

others (verse 15). Yet he had not attained; he was not perfect. He was still pressing on. He still carried a body subject to corruption that must be transformed by Christ's great power at the last (verse 21). This is what we long for — but God sees it best for us to be complete in nothing in ourselves, so that in all things we might be complete in Christ, which is best for us (Colossians 2:10).

2. I should not need to say that mortifying a sin is not the concealment of it. When a man for some outward reason gives up the outward practice of a sin, people may see him as changed. But God knows that to his former sinfulness he has added the sin of hypocrisy, and is now on a safer road to hell than before. He has gained a more cunning heart, not a new and holy one.

3. The mortification of sin does not consist in improving a quiet and calm natural temperament. Some people, by natural constitution, are not exposed to the violent, unruly passions and turbulent emotions that trouble many others. If such people cultivate and refine their natural disposition through discipline, reflection, and self-control, they may appear to themselves and others to be very mortified people — when perhaps their hearts are a standing swamp of every kind of corruption. One man may never be troubled by anger and passion his whole life — and may never trouble others — while another struggles with it almost daily. Yet the second man may have done far more toward the actual mortification of that sin than the first. Let not such people test their mortification by things that their natural temperament gives no strength to. Let them instead examine themselves with respect to self-denial, unbelief, envy, or some other spiritual sin, and they will have a much clearer view of themselves.

4. A sin is not mortified when it is merely redirected. Simon Magus gave up his sorceries for a time, but the covetousness and ambition that drove him remained and would have found another outlet. This is why Peter told him, 'I perceive you are in the gall of bitterness' — despite your profession, despite giving up your sorceries, your lust is as powerful in you as ever. It is the same lust; only its streams have been redirected. It expresses itself differently now, but it is the same old bitterness at the root. A man may become aware of a lust, set himself against its outbursts, and be careful that it does not break out as it has before — yet all the while allow the same corrupt habit to vent itself in a different direction. It is like a man who heals and closes over a running sore and thinks himself cured — while the same corrupted matter festers in his flesh and breaks out somewhere else. This kind of redirection, along with all the outward changes that accompany it, often happens for reasons that have nothing to do with grace. A change in one's way of life, relationships, interests, or pursuits may produce it. Even natural changes in a person's constitution that come with age may cause such shifts. Older men do not typically chase the lusts of youth — though they may never have mortified a single one of them. The same applies to trading one lust for another — leaving the service of one master only to serve another. The man who swaps pride for worldliness, sensuality for religious formalism, or self-indulgence for contempt of others — let him not think that he has mortified the sin he appears to have left. He has changed masters, but he is still a slave.

5. Occasional conquests of sin do not amount to mortifying it.

There are two seasons in which a man contending with a particular sin may appear to himself to have mortified it.

(1) When that sin has made a disturbing eruption that has troubled his peace, terrified his conscience, raised the fear of scandal, and provoked God in an obvious way. This shocks and stirs up everything in the man and astonishes him. It fills him with hatred of sin and of himself for it, drives him to God, makes him cry out as for his life, to hate his lust as he hates hell, and to set himself fully against it. The whole man — spiritually and naturally awakened — causes sin to shrink back, go quiet, and lie as if dead before him. It is like an enemy who crept near an army in the night and killed a key person. The guards are instantly roused; men wake up; a careful search is made for the enemy — who, in the meantime, until the noise and commotion dies down, hides himself or plays dead, fully intending to do the same harm again at the next opportunity. Consider how the believers in Corinth rallied themselves against the sin that had broken out among them (2 Corinthians 7:11). This is how it is in a person when a breach has been made upon his conscience, peace, or perhaps his reputation by some eruption of actual sin. Carefulness, indignation, desire, fear, and a spirit of revenge are all mobilized against it. Lust is quiet for a season, driven down before them. But when the commotion dies down and the inquiry ends, the thief reappears alive and is as busy as ever at his work.

(2) In a time of judgment, calamity, or pressing affliction, the heart is absorbed with thoughts and plans for escaping the present trouble, fears, and dangers. A convicted person concludes that this can only be done by giving up sin, which restores peace with God. It is God's anger perceived in every affliction that torments a convicted person. To escape it, people resolve at such times against their sins. Sin will never again have any place in them; they will

never again surrender to its service. Accordingly, sin quiets down, stops stirring, and seems to be mortified — not because it has received any wound at all, but merely because the soul has filled its faculties, through which sin would normally operate, with thoughts incompatible with sin's motions. When those thoughts are set aside, sin returns to its former life and power. The people described in Psalm 78:32-38 are a complete illustration of this state of heart.

For all this they sinned still, and did not believe in His wondrous works.

Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in sudden terror.

When He killed them, they sought Him, and returned and searched eagerly for God.

And they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer.

But they deceived Him with their mouths, and lied to Him with their tongues.

For their heart was not right with Him, and they were not faithful to His covenant.

I have no doubt that when they sought, returned, and inquired eagerly after God, they did so with full purpose of heart to give up their sins — this is expressed in the word 'returned.' To turn or return to the Lord involves the relinquishment of sin. They did this earnestly and diligently — and early. Yet their sin was unmortified through all of it (verses 36-37). This is the condition of many acts of humiliation in times of affliction, and it is often a great self-deception in the hearts even of true believers.

By these and many other means, poor souls deceive themselves and suppose they have mortified their lusts, when those lusts are alive and strong — breaking out at every opportunity to disturb and trouble them.

2. The promptness, alacrity, vigor of the Spirit, or new man in contending with, cheerful fighting against the lust spoken of, by all the ways, and with all the means that are appointed thereunto, constantly using the succors provided against its motions and actings, is a second thing hereunto required.

3. Success unto several degrees attends these two. Now this, if the distemper has not an unconquerable advantage from its natural situation, may possibly be to such a universal conquest, as the soul may never more sensibly feel its opposition, and shall however assuredly arise to an allowance of peace to the conscience, according to the terms of the covenant of grace.

## CHAPTER 7. GENERAL RULES FOR MORTIFICATION



**T**he positive description of mortification of a particular sin. Its several parts and degrees. 1. The habitual weakening of its root and principle. The power of lust to tempt. Differences in that power depending on the person and the time. 2. Constant fighting against sin. The components of that fighting are examined. 3. Success against sin. The sum of this discussion.

What it means positively to mortify a sin — which will prepare the way for specific directions — must now be considered.

The mortification of a lust consists in three things.

1. A habitual weakening of it. Every lust is a depraved habit or disposition that continually inclines the heart toward evil. Hence the description of a person with no truly mortified lust (Genesis 6:5): 'Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' Such a person always lives under the power of a strong bent and inclination toward sin. The reason a natural man is not always, perpetually, chasing some one lust day and night is that he has many to serve, each demanding satisfaction. He is driven with great variety, but always in the direction of self-satisfaction.

Consider the lust or disorder whose mortification is being sought: in itself it is a strong, deeply rooted, habitual inclination of will and affections toward some particular sin — always stirring up imaginations, thoughts, and schemes about its object. Hence people are said to have their hearts set on evil (Romans 13:14): the bent of their spirits leans toward it, always planning to gratify the flesh. A sinful and depraved habit — in this as in many other respects — differs from all natural or moral habits. Natural and moral habits incline the soul gently and agreeably with its nature, but sinful habits drive with violence and force. Hence lusts are said to wage war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11), to rebel and rise up in arms with the full force of military resistance (Romans 7:23), and to lead captive — capturing by conquest. All these are images of great violence and forcefulness.

I could show at length from the description in Romans 7 how lust darkens the mind, extinguishes convictions, dethrones reason, interrupts the power and effect of any consideration that might check it, and breaks through everything into a flame. But that is not my present purpose. The first step in mortification, then, is weakening this habit of sin or lust so that it does not rise up, conceive, erupt, provoke, entice, and disturb with that violence, intensity, and frequency it naturally has (James 1:14-15).

I want to give one caution here: although every lust by its very nature equally and universally inclines and drives toward sin, this must be qualified in two ways:

1. One lust, or the same lust in one person, may receive many accidental improvements, intensifications, and reinforcements that give it a life, power, and force far exceeding another lust or the same lust of the same type in another person. When a lust aligns

with a person's natural constitution and temperament, his way of life, and the opportunities before him — or when Satan has found a convenient handle by which to manage it, as he has a thousand ways of doing — that lust grows violent and powerful beyond others, or beyond the same lust in another person. The vapors from it darken the mind so that, though a person still knows the same things as before, they have no power or influence on his will. His corrupt affections and passions are set loose by it.

Lust especially gains strength through temptation. When a fitting temptation meets a lust, it gives it a new life, force, violence, and rage that it did not seem to have before — or even to be capable of.

2. Some lusts are far more perceptible and obvious in their violent workings than others. Paul distinguishes sexual immorality from all other sins (1 Corinthians 6:18): 'Flee sexual immorality. Every sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.' Because of this, the motions of that sin are more perceptible and discernible than others. A person may have the love of the world no less habitually dominant in him than the sin of immorality, yet it does not create the same turmoil throughout the whole person.

On this account, some men may be regarded by themselves and by others as mortified people — yet have no less a dominance of lust in them than those who cry out in astonishment at the perplexing turmoil of theirs. Their lusts simply concern things that do not create such upheaval in the soul, in which they are exercised with a calmer spirit, because the very fabric of human nature is not as directly involved in those sins as in others.

The first step in mortification, then, is weakening this habit so that it no longer drives and stirs as it did before — so that it no longer entices and draws aside, disturbs and perplexes — killing its vitality, energy, readiness, and eagerness to stir. This is what is meant by crucifying the flesh with its lusts (Galatians 5:24): draining its blood and vital spirits that give it strength and power. It is the wasting of the body of death day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Think of a man nailed to a cross: at first he struggles, strains, and cries out with great strength and vigor. But as his blood and vital strength drain away, his struggles grow faint and infrequent, his cries weak and barely audible. When a person first sets himself against a lust or corruption, it thrashes violently trying to break free. It cries out with intensity and impatience to be relieved and satisfied. But when mortification has drained its blood and vital strength, it moves seldom and feebly, cries rarely, and is scarcely heard in the heart. It may sometimes have a dying convulsion that looks like great vigor and strength, but it passes quickly — especially if kept from significant success. This is what the apostle describes, particularly in Romans 6:6.

Sin, he says, is crucified — fastened to the cross. To what end? That the body of death might be destroyed — sin's power weakened and abolished little by little — so that we should no longer serve sin. That is, sin should no longer incline and compel us with such force as to make us its servants, as it once did. This applies not only to carnal and sensual desires or worldly ambitions — not only to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — but also to the flesh that is in the mind and will, that natural opposition to God which is in us by birth. Whatever the nature of the troubling disorder, however it manifests — whether by driving

toward evil or hindering from good — the principle is the same. Unless this is done effectively, all further contention will fail to reach the goal. A man may beat down bitter fruit from a corrupt tree until he is exhausted. As long as the root remains strong and vigorous, knocking off the present fruit will not stop it from producing more. This is the folly of some people: they set themselves with all energy and diligence against the outward eruptions of lust, but leaving the principle and root untouched — perhaps never even looking for it — they make little or no real progress in mortification.

2. In constant fighting and contending against sin. Simply being able to keep pressing against sin is itself no small degree of mortification. When sin is strong and vigorous, the soul can barely hold its ground against it. It sighs, groans, mourns, and is troubled — as David speaks of himself — but it rarely has sin on the run. David complained that his sin had taken firm hold of him and he could not look up (Psalm 40:12). Several things are required in and make up this fighting against sin.

1. Knowing that you have such an enemy to deal with — recognizing it, treating it as a real enemy, one that must be destroyed by every possible means — is required for this. As I said, the contest is fierce and the stakes are high; it is a fight about eternal realities. When people have only passing, casual thoughts about their lusts, it is not a good sign that those lusts are being mortified or that they are on the path to mortification. This is what every person must do — know the plague of his own heart (1 Kings 8:38). Without this knowledge, no other work can be done. It is to be feared that very many know very little of the main enemy they carry around within their own hearts. This ignorance makes them

quick to justify themselves and impatient at reproof or warning, because they do not know that they are in any danger (2 Chronicles 16:10).

2. Laboring to become acquainted with sin's ways, tricks, methods, advantages, and the occasions of its success is the beginning of this warfare. This is how men deal with enemies: they investigate their plans and schemes, study their purposes, consider how and by what means they have previously won victories — so they can be prevented from winning again. This is how they deal with lust who truly mortify it. Not only when lust is actively vexing, enticing, and seducing them, but even in quiet moments they reflect: 'This is our enemy — this is his approach and pattern, these are his advantages, this is how he has prevailed, and this is how he will again if not prevented.' David said it this way: 'My sin is ever before me' (Psalm 51:2). Indeed, one of the choicest and most important aspects of practical spiritual wisdom consists in uncovering the subtleties, strategies, and deep workings of any indwelling sin — to consider and understand where its greatest strength lies, what advantages it tends to exploit from circumstances, opportunities, and temptations, what its arguments and pretexts and reasonings are, what its tactics and excuses and disguises are. It means setting the wisdom of the Spirit against the cunning of the old man, tracing this serpent through all its twisting and winding, and being able to say even at its most secret and imperceptible workings, 'This is your old pattern; I know what you are aiming at.' Maintaining this readiness is a vital part of our warfare.

3. Pressing sin down daily with all the things that will later be described — those that are painful, deadly, and destructive to it — is the heart of this contest. A person fighting this way never concludes that his lust is dead simply because it is quiet, but labors daily to strike it with new wounds and new blows. So the apostle writes (Colossians 3:5).

While the soul is in this condition — while it is actively pressing in this way — it is certainly on top. Sin is under the sword and dying.

3. In success: frequent success against any lust is another part and evidence of mortification. By success I mean not merely preventing sin from being carried out or completed, but winning a victory over it and pursuing it to a decisive conquest. For example: when the heart catches sin at work — seducing, forming schemes, making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts — it immediately arrests sin and brings it before God's law and the love of Christ, condemns it, and pursues it with execution to the very end.

When a man arrives at this state — where lust is weakened at its root and principle, where its motions and activities are fewer and weaker than before, so that they cannot hinder his duties or break his peace, and where he can in a calm and settled spirit find sin out, fight against it, and prevail over it — then sin is mortified to a considerable degree. Despite all its opposition, a man in this condition may have peace with God all his days.

These, then, are the headings under which I place the mortification being aimed at: the mortification of any one troubling disorder through which the general depravity and corruption of our nature tries to assert and express itself.

1. First, weakening its indwelling disposition — by which it inclines, entices, drives toward evil, rebels, opposes, and fights against God — through the planting, habitual growth, and cherishing of a principle of grace that stands in direct opposition to it and is destructive of it. This is the foundation. So pride is weakened by the planting and growth of humility; anger by patience; impurity by purity of mind and conscience; love of this world by heavenly-mindedness. These are graces of the Spirit — or the same habitual grace variously active through the Holy Spirit, according to the variety of objects it engages with — just as the various lusts are the same natural corruption variously active according to the various opportunities and circumstances it encounters.

2. The readiness, eagerness, and vigor of the Spirit or new man in contending with and cheerfully fighting against the lust in question — through all the appointed ways and means, constantly making use of the resources provided against its motions and actings — is the second element required.

## CHAPTER 8. UNIVERSAL SINCERITY REQUIRED



**G**eneral rules without which no lust will be mortified. No mortification is possible unless a man is a believer. The dangers of unregenerate people attempting to mortify sin. The duty of unconverted people with respect to mortification is examined. The emptiness of Roman Catholic attempts and rules for mortification is exposed from this.

The ways and means by which a soul may proceed to mortify any particular lust or sin — the kind that Satan exploits to trouble and weaken it — come next for consideration.

There are some general foundational matters to address first, concerning principles and foundations of this work without which no person in the world — however stirred by convictions and however resolved to mortify some sin — can ever accomplish it.

The general rules and principles without which no sin will ever be mortified are these:

1. Unless a man is a believer — truly grafted into Christ — he can never mortify a single sin. I do not say 'unless he knows himself to be one,' but unless he actually is one. Mortification is the work of believers (Romans 8:13): 'If you through the Spirit,' etc. —

'you' being believers, to whom there is no condemnation (verse 1). They alone are exhorted to it (Colossians 3:5): 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.' Who should mortify? You who are risen with Christ (verse 1), whose life is hidden with Christ in God (verse 3), who will appear with Him in glory (verse 4). An unregenerate person may do something that looks like mortification, but the real work — as it must be to be acceptable to God — he can never do. You know the picture of it that appears in some of the philosophers — Seneca, Cicero, Epictetus — with their passionate discourses about contempt of the world, self-denial, and the regulating and mastering of all excessive desires and passions. The lives of most of them showed that their maxims differed from true mortification as much as the sun painted on a signboard differs from the sun in the sky. They had neither light nor heat. There is no death of sin without the death of Christ. You know the attempts made by Roman Catholics through their vows, penances, and satisfactions. I dare say of them — I mean those who act on the principles of their church — what Paul says of Israel regarding righteousness (Romans 9:31-32): they have pursued mortification but have not attained it. Why? Because they pursue it not by faith but as if it were by works of the law. The same is the condition of all among us who, in response to their convictions and awakened consciences, attempt to give up sin. They pursue it but do not attain it.

It is true that every person who hears the law or Gospel preached is obligated to mortify sin — it is his duty. But it is not his immediate duty. It is his duty to do it, but to do it in God's way. If you direct a servant to pay a sum of money at a certain place, but first to go and collect that money at another — paying the money is

his duty and you will blame him if it is not done. Yet paying was not his immediate duty. He was first to collect it as you directed. The same principle applies here. Sin must be mortified, but something must be done first to make that possible.

I have shown that the Spirit alone can mortify sin, that He is promised for this purpose, and that all other means without Him are empty and vain. How then can someone mortify sin when he does not have the Spirit? A man could more easily see without eyes or speak without a tongue than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit. How then is the Spirit obtained? He is the Spirit of Christ. As the apostle says, 'If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him' (Romans 8:9). So if we belong to Christ and have an interest in Him, we have the Spirit — and through the Spirit alone we have the power for mortification. The apostle argues this at length (Romans 8:8): 'Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.' This is his conclusion drawn from his preceding discussion of our natural condition and our enmity toward God and His law in that state. But what is the deliverance from that condition (verse 9)? 'You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.' You believers, who have the Spirit of Christ, are not in the flesh. There is no deliverance from the state of being in the flesh except through the Spirit of Christ. And if the Spirit of Christ is in you, then mortification is underway (verse 10): 'The body is dead because of sin' — or dead to sin; mortification is proceeding; the new man is quickened toward righteousness. All attempts to mortify any lust without an interest in Christ are therefore futile. But poor souls — they labor in the fire and their work turns to ash. When the Spirit of Christ comes to this work, He will be like a refiner's fire and like

launderer's soap, purging people like gold and silver (Malachi 3:3), removing their impurity and filth (Isaiah 4:3). But people must be gold and silver at the core, or refinement will do them no good. The prophet shows us the sad outcome of wicked people's most intense attempts at mortification through whatever means God provides (Jeremiah 6:29-30): 'The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire. The smelter refines in vain, for the wicked are not drawn out. Rejected silver they are called, for the Lord has rejected them.' And what is the reason? (verse 28): They were bronze and iron when they were put into the furnace. A man may refine bronze and iron as long as he likes — he will never make them good silver.

## CHAPTER 9. CONSIDER THE DANGEROUS SYMPTOMS OF ANY LUST



**T**he second general rule is proposed. Without universal sincerity in mortifying every lust, no particular lust will be mortified. Partial mortification always springs from a corrupt motive. Being perplexed by a lust is often God's chastening for other negligences.

The second foundational principle I will propose for this purpose is this: without sincerity and diligence in universal obedience, no particular troubling lust will ever be mortified. The previous rule addressed the person; this one addresses the thing itself. Let me explain this a little.

A man finds that some lust has brought him into the condition described earlier — it is powerful, strong, and turbulent, leading him captive, vexing and disturbing him, taking away his peace. He cannot bear it. So he sets himself against it, prays against it, groans under it, sighs to be delivered from it. But all the while, in other duties — in constant communion with God, in reading, prayer, and meditation, and in other areas of life that are not of the same kind as the lust troubling him — he is careless and negli-

gent. Let not that man think he will ever arrive at the mortification of the lust that troubles him. This is a condition that often befalls people in their pilgrimage. The Israelites drew near to God with great diligence and earnestness under a sense of their sin, with fasting and prayer (Isaiah 58). Many expressions are made of their earnestness in doing it (verse 2): 'They seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways; as a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God, they ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God.' Yet God rejected it all. Their fast was a remedy that would not heal them — and the reason given (verses 5-7) is that they were only selective in their obedience. A man who has a running sore that comes from a general bodily disorder brought on by excess and bad habits — let him apply himself with whatever skill and diligence he can to treating the sore itself. If he leaves the general disordered condition of his body untreated, his labor will be in vain. So it will be with anyone who tries to stop the bleeding of sin and corruption in his soul while being equally careless about the overall spiritual health of his whole life.

1. This kind of effort at mortification comes from a corrupt principle, which means it will never produce a good result. Hatred of sin as sin — not merely as something that troubles and disturbs — and a sense of the love of Christ in the cross, lie at the foundation of all true spiritual mortification. It is certain that what I am describing here comes from self-love. You set yourself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify some lust or sin — what is your reason? It disturbs you. It has taken away your peace. It fills your heart with sorrow, trouble, and fear. You have no rest because of it. But, friend, you have neglected prayer or reading; you have

been careless and loose in your conduct in other areas that are not of the same kind as the lust troubling you. These are no less sins and evils than the one you are groaning under. Jesus Christ bled for them too. Why do you not set yourself against them as well? If you hated sin as sin — every evil way — you would be no less watchful against anything that grieves and troubles the Spirit of God than against what grieves and troubles your own soul. It is clear that you are contending against sin purely because of the trouble it causes you. If your conscience could be quiet with it, you would leave it alone. If it did not disturb you, you would not disturb it. Now, do you think God will align Himself with such hypocritical effort? Do you think His Spirit will witness to the treachery and falsehood of your own spirit? Do you think He will free you from what troubles you, so that you can return freely to what no less grieves Him? No — God says: here is one who, if freed from this lust, would never give Me another thought. Let him wrestle with this, or he is lost. Let no one expect to do his own work who will not do God's. God's work is universal obedience. Freedom from the present trouble is only yours. Hence the apostle's words (2 Corinthians 7:1): 'Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' If we will do anything, we must do everything. What is acceptable, then, is not merely an intense opposition to this or that particular lust, but a universally humble frame of heart — watchful against every evil and diligent in every duty.

2. How do you know that God has not allowed the lust troubling you to gain strength and power over you in order to chasten you for other negligences — or at least to awaken you to an examination of your ways, so that you might make a thorough change in

your whole walk with Him? The dominance of a particular lust is commonly the fruit of a generally careless and negligent life, and for two reasons.

(1) As its natural effect, so to speak. Lust, as I showed, lies in the heart of every believer while he lives — and do not think that scripture speaks in vain when it says lust is subtle, cunning, and crafty, that it seduces, entices, fights, and rebels. While a man keeps diligent watch over his heart — above all else guarding his heart, from which flow the issues of life and death — lust withers and dies within. But if through negligence lust breaks out in some particular direction, gains access to the thoughts through the affections, and perhaps from there breaks out into open sin in his conduct, its strength pours into that opening it has found. It drives mainly in that direction until, having made a passage for itself, it vexes and disturbs and cannot easily be checked. A man may thus find himself wrestling in sorrow all his days with something that a consistent, universal watchfulness might easily have prevented.

(2) As I said, God often allows this to chasten our other negligences. Just as with wicked people He gives them up to one sin as the punishment of another — a greater sin to punish a lesser, or one that holds them more firmly and securely in place of one they might have been delivered from — so even with His own people, He may and does sometimes leave them under some troubling disorder, either to prevent or cure some other evil. So the messenger of Satan was let loose on Paul, so that he would not be lifted up through the abundance of spiritual revelations. Was Paul's denial of his master not a correction of his proud self-confidence? Now if this is the state of a dominating lust — that God often allows it to prevail in order to admonish, humble, chastise, and correct us for

our generally careless and loose walk with Him — is it possible to remove the effect while leaving the cause in place? Can the particular lust be mortified while the general pattern of life remains unreformed? Let the person who genuinely wants to mortify any troubling lust take care to be equally diligent in all areas of obedience. Know that every lust and every neglected duty is a burden to God, even if only one of them is a burden to you. As long as there remains a treacherous inclination in the heart to indulge some negligence — not pressing universally toward all perfection in obedience — the soul is weak, for it does not give faith its full scope. It is self-serving, because it is more concerned with the trouble of sin than with its filth and guilt. And it lives under a constant provocation of God. Such a soul cannot expect any blessed outcome in any spiritual duty it undertakes — least of all in this one, which requires a different principle and frame of heart for its accomplishment.

1. When upon perplexing thoughts about sin, instead of applying himself to the destruction of it, a man searches his heart to see what evidences he can find of a good condition, notwithstanding that sin and lust, so that it may go well with him.

For a man to gather up his experiences of God, to call them to mind, to collect them, consider, try, improve them, is an excellent thing; a duty practiced by all the saints; commended in the Old Testament and the New. This was David's work, when he communed with his own heart, and called to remembrance the former lovingkindness of the Lord (Psalm 77:6-9). This is the duty that Paul sets us to practice (2 Corinthians 13:5). But now, to do it for this end, to satisfy conscience, which cries and calls for another purpose, is a desperate device of a heart in love with sin. When a

man's conscience shall deal with him, when God shall rebuke him for the sinful distemper of his heart, if he, instead of applying himself to get that sin pardoned in the blood of Christ, and mortified by his Spirit, shall relieve himself, by any such other evidences as he has, or thinks himself to have, and so disentangle himself from under the yoke, that God was putting on his neck; his condition is very dangerous, his wound hardly curable. Thus the Jews under the gallings of their own consciences, and the convincing preaching of our Savior, supported themselves with this, that they were Abraham's children, and on that account accepted with God; and so countenanced themselves in all abominable wickedness to their utter ruin.

This is in some degree, a blessing of a man's self, and saying that upon one account or other he shall have peace, although he adds drunkenness to thirst; love of sin, undervaluation of peace, and of all tastes of love from God, are enwrapped in such a frame. Such a one plainly shows, that if he can but keep up hope of escaping the wrath to come, he can be well content to be unfruitful in the world, at any distance from God that is not final separation. What is to be expected from such a heart?

2. By applying grace and mercy to an unmortified sin, or one not sincerely endeavored to be mortified, is this deceit carried on. This is a sign of a heart greatly entangled with the love of sin. When a man has secret thoughts in his heart, not unlike those of Naaman, about his worshipping in the house of Rimmon; in all other things I will walk with God; but in this thing, God be merciful unto me; his condition is sad. It is true indeed, a resolution to this purpose, to indulge a man's self in any sin on the account of mercy, seems to be altogether inconsistent with Christian sincer-

ity, and is a badge of a hypocrite, and is the turning of the grace of God into wantonness (Jude 4). But yet I doubt not but through the craft of Satan, and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be ensnared with this deceit of sin; or else Paul would never have so cautioned them against it as he does (Romans 6:1, 2). There is nothing more natural, than for fleshly reasonings to grow high and strong upon this account. The flesh would be indulged unto upon the account of grace: and every word that is spoken of mercy, it stands ready to catch at, and to pervert it to its own corrupt aims and purposes. To apply mercy then to a sin not vigorously mortified, is to fulfill the end of the flesh upon the Gospel.

These and many other ways and wiles, a deceitful heart will sometimes make use of, to countenance itself in its abominations. Now when a man with his sin is in this condition, that there is a secret liking of the sin prevalent in his heart, and though his will be not wholly set upon it, yet he has an imperfect desire towards it, he would practice it were it not for such and such considerations, and hereupon relieves himself other ways than by the mortification and pardon of it in the blood of Christ, that man's wounds stink and are corrupt, and he will, without speedy deliverance, be at the door of death.

(3.) Frequency of success in sin's seduction in obtaining the prevailing consent of the will unto it, is another dangerous symptom. This is that I mean: when the sin spoken of gets the consent of the will with some delight, though it be not actually outwardly perpetrated, yet it has success. A man may not be able upon outward considerations to go along with sin, to that which James calls the finishing of it (James 1:14, 15), as to the outward acts of sin,

when yet the will of sinning may be actually obtained: then has it success. Now if any lust be able thus far to prevail in the soul of any man, his condition may possibly be very bad and himself be unregenerate, it cannot possibly be very good, but dangerous. And it is all one upon the matter, whether this be done by the choice of the will, or by inadvertency; for that inadvertency itself is in a manner chosen. When we are inadvertent and negligent, where we are bound to watchfulness, and carefulness, that inadvertency does not take off from the voluntariness of what we do thereupon; for although men do not choose and resolve to be negligent and inadvertent, yet if they choose the things that will make them so, they choose inadvertency itself, as a thing may be chosen in its cause.

And let not men think that the evil of their hearts is in any measure extenuated, because they seem for the most part to be surprised into that consent which they seem to give unto it; for it is negligence of their duty in watching over their hearts, that betrays them into that surprisal.

(4.) When a man fights against his sin only with arguments from the issue, or the punishment due unto it; this is a sign that sin has taken great possession of the will, and that in the heart there is a superfluity of naughtiness. Such a man as opposes nothing to the seduction of sin and lust in his heart, but fear of shame among men, or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do the sin, if there were no punishment attending it. Those who are Christ's, and are acted in their obedience upon Gospel principles, have the death of Christ, the love of God, the detestable nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, a deep grounded abhorrence of sin as sin, to oppose to any seduction of sin, to all the

workings, strivings, fightings of lust in their hearts. So did Joseph: How shall I do this great evil (said he) and sin against the Lord, my good and gracious God? And Paul: The love of Christ constrains us (2 Corinthians 5:14). And: Having received these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollutions of flesh and spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1). But now if a man be so under the power of his lust, that he has nothing but law to oppose it with, if he cannot fight against it with Gospel weapons, but deals with it altogether with hell and judgment, which are the proper arms of the law, it is most evident, that sin has possessed itself of his will and affections, to a very great prevalency and conquest.

Such a person has cast off (as to the particular spoken of) the conduct of renewing grace, and is kept from ruin only by restraining grace; and so far is he fallen from grace, and returned under the power of the law. And can it be thought that this is not a great provocation to Christ, that men should cast off his easy gentle yoke and rule, and cast themselves under the iron yoke of the law, merely out of indulgence unto their lusts?

Try yourself by this also: when you are by sin driven to make a stand, so that you must either serve it, and rush at the command of it into folly, like the horse into the battle, or make head against it to suppress it; what do you say to your soul? What do you expostulate with yourself? Is this all: Hell will be the end of this course, vengeance will meet with me, and find me out; it is time for you to look about you, evil lies at the door? Paul's main argument to prove, that sin shall not have dominion over believers, is, that they are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). If your con-

tendings against sin be all on legal accounts, from legal principles and motives, what assurance can you attain unto, that sin shall not have dominion over you, which will be your ruin?

Know that this reserve will not long hold out: if your lust has driven you from stronger Gospel forts, it will speedily prevail against this also; do not suppose that such considerations will deliver you, when you have voluntarily given up to your enemy those helps and means of preservation which have a thousand times their strength. Rest assured in this, that unless you recover yourself with speed from this condition, the thing that you fear will come upon you; what Gospel principles do not, legal motives cannot do.

(5.) When it is probable that there is, or may be somewhat of judiciary hardness, or at least chastening punishment in your lust as disquieting; this is another dangerous symptom. That God does sometimes leave even those of his own, under the perplexing power at least of some lust or sin, to correct them for former sins, negligence and folly, I do not doubt. Hence was that complaint of the church: Why have you hardened us from the fear of your name (Isaiah 63:17)? But how shall a man know whether there be anything of God's chastening hand, in his being left to the disquietment of his distemper?

Examine your heart and ways: what was the state and condition of your soul before you fell into the entanglements of that sin which now you so complain of? Had you been negligent in duties? Had you lived inordinately to yourself? Is there the guilt of any great sin lying upon you unrepented of? A new sin may be permitted, as well as a new affliction sent to bring an old sin to remembrance.

Have you received any eminent mercy, protection, deliverance, which you did not improve in a due manner, nor were thankful for? Or have you been exercised with any affliction, without laboring for the appointed end of it? Or have you been wanting to the opportunities of glorifying God in your generation, which in his good providence he had graciously afforded unto you? Or have you conformed yourself unto the world and the men of it, through the abounding of temptations in the days wherein you live?

If you find this to have been your state, awake, call upon God; you are fast asleep in a storm of anger round about you.

(6.) When your lust has already withstood particular dealings from God against it. This condition is described (Isaiah 57:17): For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and smote him, I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. God had dealt with them about their prevailing lust, and that several ways, by affliction and desertion. But they held out against all: this is a sad condition which nothing but mere sovereign grace (as God expresses it in the next verse) can relieve a man in. God oftentimes in his providential dispensations meets with a man, and speaks particularly to the evil of his heart. This makes the man reflect on his sin, and judge himself in particular for it. Sometimes in reading of the word, God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart, and shakes him as to his present condition. More frequently in the hearing of the word preached (his great ordinance for conviction, conversion and edification) does he meet with men. God often hews men by the sword of his word in that ordinance; strikes directly on their bosom beloved lust; startles the sinner, makes him engage into the mortification and relinquishment of the evil of his heart. Now if his lust

has taken such hold on him, as to enforce him to break these bonds of the Lord, and to cast these cords from him; if it overcomes these convictions, and gets again into its old posture; if it can cure the wounds it so receives, that soul is in a sad condition.

Unspeakable are the evils which attend such a frame of heart: every particular warning to a man in such an estate, is an inestimable mercy; how then does he despise God in them, who holds out against them; and what infinite patience is this in God, that he does not cast off such a one, and swear in his wrath, that he shall never enter into his rest.

These and many other evidences are there of a lust that is dangerous, if not mortal. As our Savior said of the evil spirit, This kind goes not out but by fasting and prayer: so say I of lusts of this kind; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it, extraordinary ways must be fixed on.

This is the first particular direction; consider whether the lust or sin you are contending with, has any of these dangerous symptoms attending it.

Before I proceed, I must give one caution by the way, lest any be deceived by what has been spoken. Whereas I say, the things and evils above mentioned may befall true believers, let not any that finds the same things in himself, thence conclude that 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 he is a believer, because he is an adulterer (because David that was so, fell into adultery), as conclude it from the signs foregoing, which are the evils of sin and Satan in the hearts of believers. The seventh of Romans contains the de-

scription of a regenerate man. He that shall consider what is spoken of his dark side, of his unregenerate part, of the indwelling power and violence of sin remaining in him, and because he finds the like in himself, conclude that he is a regenerate man, will be deceived in his reckoning. If you will have evidences of your being believers, it must be from those things that constitute men believers. He that has these things in himself, may safely conclude, If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one — but that any man is so, he must look for other evidences, if he will have peace.

## CHAPTER 10. GET A CLEAR SENSE OF THE GUILT AND DANGER OF SIN



**S**pecific directions relating to the case stated above are now proposed. First, consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust: 1. Long-standing persistence. 2. Peace obtained despite it — the various ways this is done. 3. Frequency of success in its seductions. 4. The soul fighting against it with arguments drawn only from consequences. 5. Its being accompanied by judicial hardening. 6. Its withstanding specific dealings from God. The condition of persons in whom these things are found.

With the previous general rules in place, specific directions to the soul for its guidance under the pressure of a troubling lust or disorder — which is the main thing I am aiming at — now come next. Some of these directions are preparatory, and in others the actual work of mortification is contained.

First, consider what dangerous symptoms your lust has accompanying it. Look whether it carries any deadly marks or not. If it does, extraordinary remedies are required; an ordinary course of mortification will not be enough.

What are these dangerous marks and symptoms — these severe warnings accompanying an indwelling lust? I will name several.

(1) Long standing. If the lust has been corrupting in your heart for a long time — if you have allowed it to remain in power and dominance without vigorously attempting to kill it and heal the wounds it has given you — your disorder is dangerous. Have you allowed worldliness, ambition, or an all-consuming drive for study to crowd out other duties — particularly those in which you should hold constant communion with God — for a long season? Or have you allowed impurity to defile your heart with vain, foolish, and wicked imaginations for many days? Your lust has a dangerous symptom. So it was with David (Psalm 38:5): 'My wounds are foul and festering because of my folly.' When a lust has lain long in the heart — corrupting, festering, eating away — it brings the soul into a wretched condition. In such a case, ordinary humiliation will not do the work. Whatever the lust is, it will have by this time worked itself more or less into all the faculties of the soul, and made the affections at home with it. It grows familiar to the mind and conscience so that they are no longer startled by it as something strange, but are comfortable with it as something they are used to. Unless some extraordinary course is taken, such a person has no grounds in the world to expect that his end will be peaceful.

First, how will he be able to distinguish between a long-standing unmortified lust and the outright dominion of sin — which cannot happen to a regenerate person? Second, how can he promise himself that things will ever be different, or that his lust will ever stop stirring and seducing, when he sees it fixed and entrenched — having been so for many days and having remained

through many different circumstances in his life? Perhaps it has been tested by both mercies and afflictions — some of them so remarkable that the soul could not help but take special notice of them. Will it be easy to dislodge a tenant who can claim the right of long possession? Old, neglected wounds are often fatal and always dangerous. An indwelling disorder grows stubborn when allowed to sit undisturbed for a long time. Lust is the kind of tenant who, when it can claim time and something like prescription, will not easily be evicted. As it never dies on its own, so if it is not daily killed, it will always gather strength.

(2) Secret reasoning in the heart to reassure itself and maintain its peace, despite the ongoing presence of a lust and the absence of a vigorous Gospel effort to mortify it — this is another dangerous symptom of a deadly disorder. There are several ways this can happen, and I will name some of them.

1. When a person, instead of applying himself to the destruction of a troubling sin, searches his heart to find evidences of a good standing with God despite that sin — so that he can assure himself all is well.

For a person to gather up his experiences of God — to call them to mind, take stock of them, reflect on them, test them, and build on them — is an excellent thing, a duty practiced by all the saints and commended in both the Old and New Testaments. This was David's work when he communed with his own heart and called to remembrance the former lovingkindness of the Lord (Psalm 77:6-9). It is also the duty Paul sets before us (2 Corinthians 13:5). But to do it for the purpose of quieting a conscience that is crying out for something entirely different — this is a desperate device of a heart that is in love with sin. When a

person's conscience deals with him — when God rebukes him for the sinful disorder of his heart — and instead of applying himself to get that sin pardoned in the blood of Christ and mortified by His Spirit, he soothes himself with other evidences he has or thinks he has, and so slips out from under the yoke God was placing on his neck — his condition is very dangerous and his wound is hardly curable. This is what the Jews did under the pricks of their own consciences and the convicting preaching of our Savior: they bolstered themselves with the claim that they were Abraham's children and therefore accepted by God, and so excused every abominable wickedness right up to their complete ruin.

This is, in some degree, calling down a blessing on oneself and saying that one way or another there will be peace — even while adding the thirst for sin to the drinking of it. Love of sin, a low regard for peace, and a low regard for every taste of love from God are all wrapped up in such a frame of heart. Such a person plainly shows that, as long as he can keep hope of escaping wrath alive, he is perfectly content to be fruitless in the world and to live at any distance from God that falls short of final separation. What can be expected from such a heart?

2. Applying grace and mercy to an unmortified sin — or one not genuinely being mortified — is how this deception is maintained. It is a sign of a heart deeply entangled in love with sin. When a man harbors secret thoughts not unlike Naaman's about worshipping in the house of Rimmon — 'In everything else I will walk with God, but in this matter, God be merciful to me' — his condition is serious. It is true that a settled resolution to indulge in any sin on the grounds of mercy seems wholly inconsistent with Christian sincerity, and is a mark of a hypocrite — it is turning the

grace of God into license (Jude 4). Yet I have no doubt that through Satan's craftiness and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be trapped by this deceit of sin — otherwise Paul would never have cautioned them against it so earnestly (Romans 6:1-2). Nothing is more natural than for fleshly reasoning to grow strong and bold on this ground. The flesh craves indulgence on the basis of grace. Every word spoken about mercy, it stands ready to seize and twist to its own corrupt purposes. To apply mercy to a sin that is not being vigorously mortified is to make the flesh achieve its goal through the Gospel.

By these and many other devices and tricks, a deceitful heart will sometimes excuse and support itself in its corruption. When a man is in this condition with his sin — when there is a secret fondness for it prevailing in his heart, so that though his will is not fully set on it, he has an imperfect desire for it, and would practice it if not for certain consequences — and when he therefore finds relief in something other than mortification and pardon through the blood of Christ, that man's wounds are festering and corrupt. Without swift deliverance, he is at death's door.

(3) Frequency of success in sin's seduction — winning the will's consenting agreement — is another dangerous symptom. Here is what I mean: when the sin in question obtains the will's consent with some degree of pleasure, even if the sin is not outwardly committed, it has achieved success. A person may not be able for outward reasons to go all the way with sin — to what James calls the completing of it (James 1:14-15), the outward act — and yet the will to sin may actually be obtained. That is success. When any lust prevails to this extent in a person's soul, his condition may possibly be very bad and he may be unregenerate; it certainly cannot be

very good — it is dangerous. And it makes no real difference whether this happens by deliberate choice or by inadvertence, since that inadvertence is itself in a sense chosen. When we are inattentive and careless in areas where we are bound to be watchful and careful, that inattentiveness does not remove the voluntary character of what we do as a result. Although a person does not choose and decide to be inattentive, if he chooses the things that produce inattentiveness, he is in effect choosing inattentiveness itself — a thing can be chosen in its cause.

Let no one think the evil of their heart is lessened because they appear to have been surprised into the consent they give it. It is their negligence in the duty of watching over their heart that betrayed them into that surprise.

(4) When a person fights against his sin using only arguments drawn from the consequences — the punishment it will bring — this is a sign that sin has taken great possession of his will and that his heart overflows with corruption. Such a person has nothing to oppose the seduction of sin in his heart except the fear of shame among people or the fear of hell from God. He is sufficiently determined to commit the sin if no punishment were attached to it. Those who belong to Christ and who act in their obedience on the basis of Gospel principles have the death of Christ, the love of God, the detestable nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, and a deep-rooted hatred of sin as sin — to set against any seduction, against every working, striving, and fighting of lust in their hearts. So it was with Joseph: 'How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?' — his good and gracious God. And Paul: 'The love of Christ constrains us' (2 Corinthians 5:14). And: 'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all

defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1). But when a man is so much under the power of his lust that he has nothing but the law to oppose it with — when he cannot fight it with Gospel weapons but deals with it entirely through threats of hell and judgment, which are the proper weapons of the law — it is plainly evident that sin has taken possession of his will and affections to a great and prevailing degree.

Such a person has cast off (with respect to this particular sin) the guidance of renewing grace, and is kept from ruin only by restraining grace. To that extent he has fallen from grace and returned under the power of the law. And can it be thought that it is anything less than a serious provocation to Christ, that people should throw off His easy and gentle yoke and rule, casting themselves under the iron yoke of the law — purely out of indulgence to their lusts?

Test yourself here as well. When sin drives you to a standstill where you must either serve it — rushing headlong at its command into folly, like a horse charging into battle — or stand against it and suppress it, what do you say to your soul? What do you wrestle with yourself about? Is this all: 'Hell will be the end of this course; judgment will find me out. It is time to get serious; evil is at the door'? Paul's main argument for why sin shall not have dominion over believers is that they are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). If all your contending against sin is on legal grounds — from legal principles and legal motives — what confidence can you have that sin will not have dominion over you, which would be your ruin?

Know this: that last line of defense will not hold for long. If your lust has already driven you from the stronger Gospel fortifications, it will quickly overpower this one too. Do not suppose that such considerations will deliver you when you have voluntarily surrendered to your enemy the far more powerful helps and safeguards that could have protected you a thousand times over. Be assured of this: unless you recover yourself from this condition quickly, the very thing you fear will come upon you. What Gospel principles cannot do, legal threats cannot do either.

(5) When there is reason to think that there may be something of judicial hardening — or at least of chastening punishment — in your lust as it troubles you, this is another dangerous symptom. I have no doubt that God sometimes leaves even His own people under the perplexing power of some lust or sin, at least in part, to correct them for past sins, negligence, and carelessness. Hence the church's complaint: 'Why, O Lord, do You cause us to stray from Your ways and harden our heart from fearing You?' (Isaiah 63:17). But how can a person know whether God's chastening hand is in his being left to the distress of his disorder?

Examine your heart and your ways. What was the condition of your soul before you became entangled in the sin you are now complaining about? Had you been negligent in your duties? Had you been living in a self-indulgent, self-centered way? Is there the guilt of any great sin lying upon you that you have never repented of? A new sin may be permitted — just as a new affliction may be sent — to bring an old sin to remembrance.

## CHAPTER 11. LOAD THE CONSCIENCE WITH GUILT; FURTHER DIRECTIONS



**T**he second specific direction. Get a clear sense of (1) the guilt of the troubling sin. Considerations to help with this are proposed. (2) The danger — which is manifold: 1. Hardening. 2. Temporal correction. 3. Loss of peace and strength. 4. Eternal destruction. Rules for applying this consideration properly. (3) The evil of it: 1. In grieving the Spirit. 2. In wounding the new creature.

The second direction is this: get a clear and lasting sense upon your mind and conscience of (1) the guilt, (2) the danger, and (3) the evil of the sin that is troubling you.

(1) The guilt of it. One of the deceits of a dominating lust is that it minimizes its own guilt. 'Is it not a small thing?' 'When I bow in the house of Rimmon — God be merciful to me in this.' 'Though this is bad, it is not as bad as such and such an evil. Other godly people have struggled with such things. Think of the dreadful sins some of them actually fell into!' Sin diverts the mind from an honest assessment of its guilt in countless ways. Its foul vapors darken the mind so that it cannot judge rightly. Troubling reasonings, excusing promises, turbulent desires, treacherous half-intentions to

repent, and vague hopes of mercy all have a share in disturbing the mind's assessment of a dominating lust's guilt. The prophet tells us that lust will do this completely when it reaches its height (Hosea 4:11): 'Harlotry, wine, and new wine take away the understanding' — the understanding, which is what 'heart' often refers to in scripture. Solomon tells us of the young man enticed by the loose woman: he was among the simple, a young man without sense (Proverbs 7:7). And what was his folly (verse 23)? He did not know it would cost him his life. He did not consider the guilt of what he was involved in. This is what lust does in the heart — it darkens the mind so that it cannot judge rightly about its own guilt. Let this then be the first concern of anyone who wants to mortify sin: fix a right judgment of its guilt in his mind. To help with this, take these considerations:

1. Though the power of sin is weakened by indwelling grace in those who have it — so that sin does not have dominion over them as it does over others — the guilt of the sin that still remains is actually heightened and aggravated by that grace (Romans 6:1-2): 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?' How shall we do it — we who have received grace from Christ working against it? We would surely be more evil than anyone if we did. There is incomparably more evil and guilt in the working of remaining sin in your heart than there would be in the same amount of sin if you had no grace at all.

2. Just as God sees abundant beauty and excellence in the desires of His servants' hearts — more than in even the most glorious acts of other people — so God sees great evil in the workings of lust in their hearts, more than in the open and notorious acts of wicked

people, or in many outward sins that the saints may fall into. This is because those outward sins meet with more inward resistance and are generally followed by more humiliation. So Christ, in dealing with His failing children, goes straight to the root. He looks past their profession (Revelation 3:15): 'I know you; you are something quite different from what you profess — and this makes you detestable.'

Let these and similar considerations lead you to a clear sense of the guilt of your indwelling lust, so that there is no room in your heart for thoughts that minimize or excuse it — thoughts by which sin quietly gathers strength and prevails.

(2) Consider the danger of it, which is manifold:

1. The danger of being hardened by its deceitfulness. The apostle solemnly charges this upon the Hebrews (Hebrews 3:12-13): 'Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.' 'Take care,' he says — use every means, consider your temptations, watch diligently. There is treachery and deceit in sin that tends toward hardening your heart away from the fear of God. The hardening mentioned here is of the most complete kind — utter moral numbness. Sin tends toward it, and every disorder and lust will make at least some progress in that direction. You who were tender and used to melt under the word and under afflictions will grow — as some have profanely put it — 'sermon-proof' and 'sickness-proof.' You who once trembled at the presence of God, at thoughts of death and standing before Him — even when you had more assurance of His love than you have now — will develop a stubbornness of spirit

that none of these things can move. Your soul and your sin will be spoken of, and spoken to, and you will feel nothing. You will pass through duties — prayer, attending services, reading — and your heart will not be affected in the slightest. Sin will grow a trivial thing to you. You will walk past it as if it were nothing. This is what it will come to — and what will the end of such a condition be? Can anything sadder befall you? Is it not enough to make any heart tremble to think of being brought to a state where you have slight thoughts of sin — slight thoughts of grace, of mercy, of the blood of Christ, of the law, of heaven and hell — all coming together at the same time? Take heed: this is where your lust is working — toward the hardening of the heart, the searing of the conscience, the blinding of the mind, the deadening of the affections, and the deceiving of the whole soul.

2. The danger of serious temporal correction — what scripture calls vengeance, judgment, and punishment (Psalm 89:30-33). Even if God does not cast you off entirely for the corruption in your heart, He will visit you with the rod. Though He pardons and forgives, He will still punish your offenses. Remember David and all his troubles. Think of him fleeing into the wilderness and consider God's hand upon him. Is it nothing to you that God might kill your child in anger, ruin your estate in anger, break your bones in anger, let you become a scandal and a reproach in anger, bring you low and destroy you, make you lie down in darkness in anger? Is it nothing that He might punish, ruin, and undo others because of you? Let me not be misunderstood — I am not saying God always sends these things on His people in anger. God forbid. But what I am saying is this: when He does deal with you this way, and your

conscience confirms what your provocations have been, you will find His dealings full of bitterness to your soul. If you do not fear these things, I am afraid you may already be under hardening.

3. Loss of peace and strength all a person's days. To have peace with God and strength to walk before God is the sum of the great promises of the covenant of grace. In these things is the life of our souls. Without them in some meaningful measure, to live is to die. What good does life do us if we never see the face of God in peace? If we have no strength to walk with Him? An unmortified lust will certainly rob a person of both. This is so clearly demonstrated in David that nothing could be plainer. How often does he complain that his bones are broken, his soul disturbed, his wounds severe on this account? Take another instance (Isaiah 57:17): 'Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry.' What peace is there for a soul while God hides Himself? What strength while He strikes? (Hosea 5:15): 'I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face.' 'I will leave them, hide My face' — and what will become of their peace and strength? If you have ever enjoyed peace with God, if His terrors have ever made you afraid, if you have ever had strength to walk with Him, or ever mourned in prayer and been troubled by your weakness — think of this danger that hangs over your head. Perhaps in only a little while you will see the face of God in peace no more. Perhaps by tomorrow you will not be able to pray, read, attend services, or perform any duty with the least cheerfulness, life, or vigor — and possibly you may never see a quiet hour as long as you live. You may carry broken bones full of pain and terror all your remaining days. Indeed, God may shoot His arrows at you, fill you with anguish and confusion — with fears

and perplexities — make you a terror and an astonishment to yourself and others, show you hell and wrath at every moment, frighten and unnerve you with dreadful senses of His hatred, so that your wound runs open through the night and your soul refuses comfort, so that you wish for death rather than life — your soul may even prefer strangling. Consider this at length. Though God might not utterly destroy you, He might bring you into a condition where you have vivid and crushing apprehensions of your own destruction. Let these thoughts become familiar to you. Let your soul know what is likely to be the end of its present course. Do not turn away from this consideration until it has made your soul tremble within you.

4. There is the danger of eternal destruction. For the proper handling of this consideration, note:

1. There is such a connection between persisting in sin and eternal destruction that, although God resolves to deliver some from persisting in sin so that they will not be destroyed, He will deliver no one from destruction who persists in sin. Therefore, as long as anyone remains under the enduring power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God must be held out to him (Hebrews 3:12; Hebrews 10:38). This is God's way of dealing: if anyone turns away from Him and draws back through unbelief, God's soul takes no pleasure in him — that is, His wrath will pursue him to destruction (Galatians 6:8).

2. A person so entangled (as described above) under the power of some corruption can have, at that moment, no clear and prevailing evidence of his interest in the covenant — by whose power he might be delivered from fear of destruction. Therefore destruction from the Lord may rightly terrify him. He may and ought to look

on it as the likely end of his present course and way. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1). True — but who can claim this for themselves? Those who walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. But you may ask: is this not persuading people to unbelief? I answer: no. There are two different judgments a person may make about himself: (1) a judgment about his person, and (2) a judgment about his ways. It is the judgment of his ways, not his person, that I am speaking of. Let a person hold the best evidence of his standing as a person that he can — it is still his duty to judge that an evil way leads to destruction. Not to judge this is atheism. I am not saying that in such a condition a person ought to throw away his evidences of personal standing in Christ. I am saying he cannot hold onto them. There are two kinds of self-condemnation:

First, with respect to what one deserves: when the soul concludes that it deserves to be cast out from God's presence. This is not unbelief — it is an effect of faith.

Second, with respect to the outcome: when the soul concludes it will be damned. I am not saying this is anyone's duty, and I am not calling people to it. But what I am saying is this: a person ought to conclude that the path he is on leads to death, so that he may be moved to flee from it. This is another consideration that ought to weigh upon such a soul if it truly desires to be freed from the entanglement of its lusts.

(3) Consider the present evils of it. Danger looks at what is coming; present evils are here now. Some of the many evils attending an unmortified lust may be mentioned.

1. It grieves the Holy and Blessed Spirit, who is given to believers to dwell and abide in them. The apostle, turning people away from many lusts and sins, gives this as the great motive (Ephesians 4:30): 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.' 'Do not grieve that Spirit of God,' he says — through whom you receive so many and so great benefits, of which he names one signal and comprehensive one: being sealed for the day of redemption. He is grieved by it as a tender and loving friend is grieved by the unkindness of someone he has served well. This is how it is with this tender and loving Spirit, who has chosen our hearts as His dwelling place to do everything there that our souls need. He is grieved by our sheltering His enemies — those He came to destroy — in our hearts alongside Him. He does not afflict willingly or grieve us (Lamentations 3:33). Shall we daily grieve Him? If there is any gracious integrity left in the soul — if it has not been utterly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin — this consideration will certainly affect it. Consider who and what you are, who the Spirit is who is being grieved, what He has done for you, what He comes to your soul for, what He has already done in you — and be ashamed. Among those who walk with God, there is no greater motivation and incentive to universal holiness and the keeping of heart and spirit in complete purity than this: the blessed Spirit who has undertaken to dwell in them as temples of God, and to keep them fit for the One who dwells there, is constantly attending to what they are entertaining in their hearts — and rejoices when His temple is kept undefiled. It was a severe aggravation of Zimri's sin that he brought his mistress into the congregation before the eyes of Moses and the rest who were weeping for the people's sins (Numbers 25:6). Is it not an equally

severe aggravation to excuse a lust or allow it to remain in the heart — when it is entertained (as it must be, if we are believers) directly under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit, who is personally committed to keeping His dwelling place pure and holy?

2. The Lord Jesus is freshly wounded by it. His new creation in the heart is wounded. His love is frustrated, His adversary gratified. Just as a complete abandonment of Him through the deceitfulness of sin is a crucifying Him afresh and putting Him to open shame, so every sheltering of the sin He came to destroy wounds and grieves Him.

3. It will take away a person's usefulness in his generation. His work, his efforts, and his labors seldom receive God's blessing. If he is a preacher, God commonly blows against his ministry, so that he labors and receives no honor in it, doing no real work for God. The same may be said of people in other callings. The world today is full of withering, fruitless professing Christians. How few walk in any beauty or glory; how barren and useless most of them are. Among the many reasons that could be given for this sad condition, it may rightly be feared that this is not the least effective: many people harbor soul-devouring lusts in their hearts that lie like worms at the root of their obedience, gnawing and weakening it day by day. Every grace, every means by which graces may be exercised and strengthened, is damaged by this — and as for any real fruit, God blights such people's efforts.

This, then, is the second direction. It addresses the opposition to be made against lust with respect to its habitual presence in the soul. Keep alive on your heart these or similar considerations of lust's guilt, danger, and evil. Give much time to meditating on these things. Cause your heart to dwell and abide with them. Draw

your thoughts into these considerations. Do not let them drift away or wander until they begin to exercise real power over your soul — until they make it tremble.

Fourthly, being thus affected with your sin, in the next place, get a constant longing, breathing after deliverance from the power of it. Suffer not your heart one moment to be contented with your present frame and condition. Longing desires after any thing, in things natural and civil, are of no value nor consideration, any further, but as they incite and stir up the person in whom they are, to a diligent use of means for the bringing about the thing aimed at. In spiritual things it is otherwise. Longing, breathing and panting after deliverance, is a grace in itself, that has a mighty power to conform the soul into the likeness of the thing longed after. Hence the Apostle describing the repentance and godly sorrow of the Corinthians, reckons this as one eminent grace that was then set on work; vehement desire (2 Corinthians 7:11). And in this case of indwelling sin, and the power of it, what frame does he express himself to be in? (Romans 7:24) — his heart breaks out with longings into a most passionate expression of desire of deliverance. Now if this be the frame of saints, upon the general consideration of indwelling sin, how is it to be heightened and increased, when thereunto is added the perplexing rage and power of any particular lust and corruption? Assure yourself, unless you long for deliverance you shall not have it.

This will make the heart watchful for all opportunities of advantage against its enemy; and ready to close with any assistances that are afforded for its destruction; strong desires are the very life

of that praying always which is enjoined us in all conditions, and in none is more necessary than in this; they set faith and hope on work, and are the soul's moving after the Lord.

Get your heart then into a panting and breathing frame, long, sigh, cry out; you know the example of David.

The fifth direction is:

Consider whether the distemper with which you are perplexed, be not rooted in your nature, and cherished, fomented and heightened from your constitution. A proneness to some sins may doubtless lie in the natural temper and disposition of men. In this case consider:

1. This is not in the least an extenuation of the guilt of your sin.

Some with an open profaneness will ascribe gross enormities to their temper and disposition. And whether others may not relieve themselves from the pressing guilt of their distempers by the same consideration, is uncertain. It is from the fall, from the original depravation of our natures, that the fuel and nourishment of any sin abides in our natural temper. David reckons his being shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5), as an aggravation of his following sin, not a lessening or extenuation of it. That you are peculiarly inclined unto any sinful distemper, is but a peculiar breaking out of original lust in your nature, which should peculiarly abase and humble you.

2. That which you have to fix upon on this account, in reference to your walking with God, is, that so great an advantage is given to sin, as also to Satan, by this your temper and disposition, that without extraordinary watchfulness, care and diligence, they will assuredly prevail against your soul. Thousands have been on

this account hurried headlong to hell, who otherwise (at least) might have gone at a more gentle, less provoking, less mischievous rate.

3. For the mortification of any distemper so rooted in the nature of a man, unto all other ways and means already named or further to be insisted on, there is one expedient peculiarly suited. This is that of the Apostle (1 Corinthians 9:27): I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection. The bringing of the very body into subjection, is an ordinance of God, tending to the mortification of sin. This gives check unto the natural root of the distemper, and withers it by taking away its fatness of soil. Perhaps because the Papists (men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, the work of his Spirit, and whole business in hand) have laid the whole weight and stress of mortification in voluntary services and penances — leading to the subjection of the body, knowing indeed the true nature neither of sin nor mortification — it may on the other side be a temptation to some, to neglect some means of humiliation, which by God himself are owned and appointed. The bringing of the body into subjection in the case insisted on, by cutting short the natural appetite, by fasting, watching, and the like, is doubtless acceptable to God, so it be done with the ensuing limitations.

(1) That the outward weakening and impairing of the body, be not looked upon as a thing good in itself, or that any mortification consists therein (which were again to bring us under carnal ordinances) but only as a means for the end proposed; the weakening of any distemper in its natural root and seat. A man may have leanness of body and soul together.

(2) That the means whereby this is done, namely, by fasting and watching, and the like, be not looked on as things that in themselves, and by virtue of their own power, can produce true mortification of any sin; for if they would, sin might be mortified without any help of the Spirit, in any unregenerate person in the world. They are to be looked on only as ways whereby the Spirit may, and sometimes does put forth strength for the accomplishing of his own work, especially in the case mentioned. Want of a right understanding and due improvement of these and the like considerations, has raised a mortification among the Papists that may be better applied to horses and other beasts of the field, than to believers.

This is the sum of what has been spoken; when the distemper complained of seems to be rooted in natural temper and constitution, in applying our souls to a participation of the blood and Spirit of Christ, an endeavor is to be used, to give check in the way of God, to the natural root of that distemper.

Sixthly, consider what occasions, what advantages your distemper has taken to exert and put forth itself, and watch against them all. This is one part of that duty which our blessed Savior recommends to his disciples under the name of watching (Mark 13:37): I say unto you all, Watch; which in Luke 21:34 is, Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged. Watch against all eruptions of your corruptions. I mean that duty which David professed himself to be exercised unto: I have (said he) kept myself from my iniquity — he watched all the ways and workings of his iniquity to prevent them, to rise up against them. This is that which we are called unto under the name of considering our ways: consider what ways, what companies, what opportunities, what studies,

what businesses, what conditions, have at any time given, or do usually give advantages to your distempers, and set yourself heedfully against them all. Men will do this with respect unto their bodily infirmities and distempers; the seasons, the diet, the air, that have proved offensive shall be avoided. Are the things of the soul of less importance? Know that he that dares to dally with occasions of sin, will dare to sin. He that will venture upon temptations unto wickedness, will venture upon wickedness. Hazeel thought he should not be so wicked as the prophet told him he would be: to convince him, the prophet tells him no more, but Thou shalt be king of Syria. If he will venture on temptations unto cruelty, he will be cruel. Tell a man he shall commit such and such sins, he will startle at it: if you can convince him, that he will venture on such occasions and temptations of them, he will have little ground left for his confidence.

Seventhly, rise mightily against the first actings of your distemper, its first conceptions; suffer it not to get the least ground. Do not say, thus far it shall go, and no further. If it has allowance for one step, it will take another. It is impossible to fix bounds to sin. It is like water in a channel; if it once break out, it will have its course. Its not acting, is easier to be compassed than its bounding. Therefore does James give that gradation and process of lust (James 1:14-15), that we may stop at the entrance. Do you find your corruption to begin to entangle your thoughts; rise up with all your strength against it, with no less indignation than if it had fully accomplished what it aims at. Consider what an unclean thought would have; it would have you roll yourself in folly and filth. Ask envy what it would have; murder and destruction is at the end of it. Set yourself against it with no less vigor, than if it had utterly

debased you to wickedness. Without this course you will not prevail. As sin gets ground in the affections to delight in it, it gets also upon the understanding to slight it.

## CHAPTER 12. THOUGHTFULNESS OF THE EXCELLENCY OF THE MAJESTY OF GOD



**T**he third direction: load the conscience with the guilt of the troubling disorder. The ways and means of doing this. The fourth direction: a deep longing for deliverance. The fifth direction: some disorders are deeply rooted in men's natural temperament — considerations for dealing with such disorders and the ways of addressing them. The sixth direction: occasions and advantages for sin must be avoided. The seventh direction: the first stirrings of sin must be vigorously resisted.

This is the third direction:

Load your conscience with the guilt of it. Do not merely acknowledge that it has guilt — press the guilt of its actual outbreaks and disturbances upon your conscience.

For the right application of this rule, some specific steps are needed.

First, follow God's method: begin with general considerations and work down to specific ones.

(1) Charge your conscience with the guilt that appears in your sin when measured against the righteousness and holiness of the law. Bring the holy law of God before your conscience. Hold your corruption up against it and pray that you would be affected by it. Reflect on the holiness, spirituality, burning severity, inwardness, and absolute demands of the law, and consider how you would stand before it. Dwell much on affecting your conscience with the terror of the Lord as expressed in the law, and on how just it would be for every one of your transgressions to receive its due punishment. Your conscience may try to deflect the force of this consideration with objections — such as: the condemning power of the law does not apply to you, you have been freed from it, and so on. Therefore, even if you are not conforming to it, you need not be so troubled. But:

1. Tell your conscience that it cannot produce any convincing evidence that you are freed from the condemning power of sin while your unmortified lust remains in your heart. So perhaps the law may yet have a valid claim against you — and if it does, you are a lost person. It is therefore best to weigh everything it has to say to the fullest.

Surely the person who pleads in the most secret corner of his heart that he is freed from the condemning power of the law — and uses that claim to quietly excuse granting even the slightest allowance to any sin or lust — is not in a position on Gospel grounds to produce any convincing spiritual evidence that he is genuinely freed from what he claims to be delivered from.

2. Whatever the outcome, the law has a commission from God to seize transgressors wherever it finds them and bring them before His throne to plead their case. This is your present situation:

the law has found you out and will bring you before God. If you can plead a pardon, well and good. If not, the law will do its work.

3. In any case, this is the law's proper work: to expose sin in its guilt, to awaken and humble the soul for it, to serve as a mirror that shows sin in its true colors. If you refuse to deal with it on this account, the refusal does not come from faith but from the hardness of your heart and the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a door through which many professing Christians have walked out into open apostasy. They have claimed such a deliverance from the law that they will no longer let it guide or direct them, no longer measure their sin by it. Little by little this idea has moved imperceptibly from mere theory to shape their practical thinking — and having taken hold there, has set the will and affections loose to every kind of corruption.

By such means as these, then, persuade your conscience to listen carefully to what the law speaks in the Lord's name to you about your lust and corruption. If your ears are open, it will speak with a voice that makes you tremble — casting you to the ground and filling you with astonishment. If you ever want to mortify your corruptions, you must bind your conscience to the law, shut it off from all evasions and excuses, until it owns its guilt fully and clearly — so that as David says, your iniquity may ever be before you.

(2) Bring your lust to the Gospel — not for relief but for further conviction of its guilt. Look on Him whom you have pierced, and mourn deeply. Ask your soul: what have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on? Is this the return I make to the Father for His love, to the Son for

His blood, to the Holy Spirit for His grace? Is this how I repay the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, 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 boldness before Him? Have I valued communion with Him so little that for the sake of this vile lust I have left Him almost no room in my heart? How shall I escape if I neglect so great a salvation? In the meantime, what shall I say to the Lord? Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation — I have despised them all and counted them as nothing, so that I might harbor a lust in my heart.

Did I obtain a view of God's fatherly face so that I might look upon it and provoke Him to His face? Was my soul washed so that room might be made for new defilements? Shall I labor to frustrate the purpose of the death of Christ? Shall I daily grieve the Spirit by whom I am sealed to the day of redemption? Keep your conscience engaged in this examination daily. If it can stand before this weight of aggravated guilt without sinking and being broken, I fear your condition is dangerous.

Second, come down to specific and personal considerations. Just as under the general law and Gospel all their benefits — redemption, justification, and the rest — are to be considered, so in particular, consider how God's love in those benefits has been personally expressed toward your own soul, and use this to make the guilt of your corruption feel even heavier.

1. Consider God's infinite patience and forbearance toward you personally. Consider how many opportunities He could have taken to expose you to shame and disgrace in this world and make you an object of His wrath forever. Consider how you have dealt

treacherously and falsely with Him time after time — flattering Him with your lips while breaking every promise and commitment — and all through this very sin you are now pursuing. Yet He has spared you time after time, even when you seemed to be boldly testing just how long His patience would last. And will you still sin against Him? Will you still wear Him out and make Him serve under your corruptions?

Have you not often been ready to conclude that it was utterly impossible He could bear with you any longer — that He would cast you off and be gracious no more, that all His forbearance was exhausted and that hell and wrath stood ready for you? And yet far beyond all your expectation He returned with fresh visits of love. And will you still continue provoking the eyes of His glory?

2. How many times have you been on the edge of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and been brought back to communion with Him by God's infinitely rich grace?

Have you not found grace decaying — delight in duties, ordinances, prayer, and meditation vanishing — while inclinations toward careless, loose living grew stronger? Have you not found yourself almost beyond recovery, like those who were once similarly entangled? Have you not found yourself drawn into ways, communities, and friendships — with actual delight — that God abhors? And will you venture to the edge of hardness again?

3. All of God's gracious dealings with you in His providence — His deliverances, afflictions, mercies, and blessings — all must be brought to bear here. Through these and similar means, load your conscience and do not let it go until it is thoroughly affected by the guilt of your indwelling corruption — until it feels its wound and

lies prostrate before the Lord. Unless this is accomplished fully, all other efforts will be useless. As long as the conscience has any means to soften the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt its mortification.

Fourth, having been deeply affected by your sin in this way, your next step is to develop a steady longing and reaching after deliverance from its power. Do not let your heart be content for a single moment with your present condition. In natural and everyday things, longing desires are significant only insofar as they move the person to diligently use whatever means will bring about what is longed for. In spiritual things it is different. Longing, reaching, and thirsting after deliverance is itself a grace — and it has tremendous power to shape the soul into the likeness of the thing it longs for. When the apostle describes the repentance and godly sorrow of the Corinthians, he lists this as one of the outstanding graces at work in them: eager desire (2 Corinthians 7:11). And in the case of indwelling sin and its power, what frame does Paul himself express (Romans 7:24)? His heart bursts out in an intensely passionate cry of longing for deliverance. Now if this is the condition of saints under the general weight of indwelling sin, how much more should that longing be intensified when to it is added the tormenting power of some particular lust and corruption? Be assured: unless you long for deliverance, you will not receive it.

This longing will make the heart watchful for every opportunity to gain advantage over its enemy, and ready to embrace every help offered for its destruction. Deep desires are the very life of that unceasing prayer that is commanded of us in every condition

— and no condition demands it more than this. Such desires set faith and hope to work, and are the soul's constant reaching after the Lord.

Get your heart into this condition of reaching and longing. Long, sigh, and cry out. You know David's example.

The fifth direction is:

Consider whether the disorder troubling you is not rooted in your natural temperament and nourished, fostered, and intensified by your constitution. Some people are undoubtedly inclined by their natural character to particular sins. If this is your case, consider:

1. This is in no way a lessening of the guilt of your sin.

Some people with open shamelessness attribute gross and terrible sins to their temperament. And whether others may not do the same thing more quietly — easing the pressing guilt of their disorders with this same excuse — is uncertain. It is from the fall, from the original corruption of our natures, that the fuel and nourishment of any sin abides in our natural character. David counts being shaped in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5) as an aggravation of his subsequent sin, not as a mitigation of it. The fact that you are especially inclined to some particular sinful disorder is simply a particular expression of original lust in your nature — and it should produce particular humility and lowliness in you.

2. What you must face on this account, with respect to your walk with God, is this: your natural temperament gives sin and Satan such a significant advantage that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence, they will surely prevail against

your soul. Thousands have been hurried headlong to hell on this account who, at the very least, might otherwise have proceeded at a more measured, less openly provoking, and less destructive pace.

3. For the mortification of any disorder so deeply rooted in a person's nature, there is one remedy especially suited, in addition to all other ways and means already named or to be mentioned later. It is what the apostle speaks of (1 Corinthians 9:27): 'I discipline my body and make it my slave.' Bringing the very body into subjection is an ordinance of God that contributes to the mortification of sin. It checks the natural root of the disorder and weakens it by taking away its rich soil. Perhaps because Roman Catholics — people ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, the work of His Spirit, and the whole matter at hand — have placed the entire weight and substance of mortification in voluntary bodily disciplines and penances, knowing neither the true nature of sin nor of mortification, some on the other side may be tempted to neglect means of humiliation which God Himself has authorized and appointed. Bringing the body into subjection in the case described — by cutting short natural appetite through fasting, watchfulness, and similar means — is undoubtedly acceptable to God, provided the following conditions are observed.

(1) That the outward weakening and impairing of the body must not be looked on as something good in itself, or as if mortification consisted in it — that would be to bring us back under bodily regulations. It is to be viewed only as a means toward the proposed end: weakening any particular disorder at its natural root and seat. A man may have leanness of body and soul together.

(2) That the means by which this is done — fasting, watchfulness, and the like — must not be viewed as things that by their own power can produce true mortification of any sin. If they could, sin could be mortified without any help of the Spirit in any unregenerate person in the world. They are to be seen only as ways through which the Spirit may — and sometimes does — put forth His strength for the accomplishing of His own work, especially in the case described. Failure to properly understand and apply this, along with similar principles, has produced a Roman Catholic mortification more suitable to horses and other animals than to believers.

This is the sum of what has been said: when the disorder complained of seems rooted in natural temperament and constitution, in applying ourselves to a participation in the blood and Spirit of Christ, an effort should also be made — in God's way — to check that disorder's natural root.

Sixth, consider what occasions and advantages your disorder has used to express and assert itself, and watch against all of them. This is one part of the duty our blessed Savior commends to His disciples under the name of watching (Mark 13:37): 'And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.' In Luke 21:34 this is expressed as: 'Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighed down.' Watch against all eruptions of your corruptions. I mean the duty David described when he said: 'I have kept myself from my iniquity' — he watched all the ways and workings of his iniquity to prevent them and rise up against them. This is what we are called to under the name of examining our ways: consider what ways, what companions, what opportunities, what studies, what activities, and what circumstances have at any time given — or usually give — advan-

tages to your disorders, and set yourself carefully against them all. People do this for bodily ailments and disorders — they avoid the seasons, foods, and environments that have proven harmful. Are the things of the soul of less importance? Know that the person who dares to play with the occasions of sin will dare to sin. The person who ventures into the temptations of wickedness will venture into wickedness itself. Hazael thought he would not be as wicked as the prophet told him he would be. To show him otherwise, the prophet simply said, 'You will be king of Syria.' If he ventures into the temptations of cruelty, he will become cruel. Tell a person he will commit certain sins, and he will recoil at it. But if you can convince him that he will put himself into the occasions and temptations of those sins, he will have little ground left for his confidence.

## CHAPTER 13. SPEAK NO PEACE TO THE HEART UNTIL GOD SPEAKS IT



**T**he eighth direction: thoughts about the greatness and majesty of God; our lack of genuine knowledge of Him, proposed and considered.

Eighth, make use of meditations that will at all times fill you with self-humbling and a sense of your own unworthiness before God.

1. Give much thought to the majesty and greatness of God and to the infinite, inconceivable distance at which you stand from Him. Many such thoughts cannot but fill you with a sense of your own unworthiness — and that strikes deep at the root of any indwelling sin. When Job came to a clear view of the greatness and excellency of God, he was filled with self-aborrence and was pressed to humiliation (Job 42:5-6). And in what condition does the prophet Habakkuk describe himself when he grasped the majesty of God? (Habakkuk 3:16). Job says, 'With God is awesome majesty' (Job 37:22). This is why people in ancient times thought that to see God was to die. Scripture is full of this self-humbling comparison — placing human beings alongside grasshoppers, compared to nothing, like dust on scales, before God (Isaiah

40:13-15). Give much thought to things like this to humble the pride of your heart and keep your soul low before God. Nothing will leave you less open to sin's deceits than a heart in this frame. Think greatly of the greatness of God.

2. Think much about how little you actually know of Him. Though you know enough to keep you humble and low, how small a portion of Him do you actually grasp! The contemplation of this drove the wise man to the astonishing assessment of himself expressed in Proverbs 30:2-4: 'Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom, nor do I have knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name, if you know?' Work with this as well, to bring down the pride of your heart. What do you actually know of God? How small a portion is it? How immeasurable is He in His nature? Can you look without terror into the abyss of eternity? You cannot even bear the rays of His glorious being.

Because this consideration is greatly useful in our walk with God — insofar as it can be held alongside the confident access we have in Jesus Christ to draw near to the throne of grace — dwelling on it at some length will leave a lasting impression on those who desire to walk humbly with God.

Consider then, to keep your heart in continual awe of God's majesty, that even the most highly advanced people — those with the nearest and most intimate communion with God — know in this life only a very little of Him and His glory. God reveals His name to Moses — the most glorious attributes He has manifested

in the covenant of grace (Exodus 34:5-6). Yet all of it is only 'the back parts' of God. Everything Moses learns through it is still small and low compared to the perfection of God's glory.

Hence it is said with particular reference to Moses: 'No one has seen God at any time' (John 1:18). The apostle speaks of Moses in comparison with Christ (verse 17), and it is said of Moses: 'No one' — not even Moses, the most eminent among them — 'has seen God at any time.' We speak much of God; we can talk about Him, His ways, His works, and His purposes all day long. The truth is, we know very little of Him. Our thoughts, meditations, and expressions about Him are limited — many unworthy of His glory, none reaching His perfections.

You may say that Moses was under the old covenant, when God wrapped Himself in darkness and concealed His mind in types, shadows, and obscure forms of worship. Under the glorious light of the Gospel, which has brought life and immortality to light — with God now revealing Himself from His own heart — we know Him far more clearly, as He truly is. We see His face now, not merely His back parts as Moses did.

I acknowledge a vast and nearly inconceivable difference between the knowledge of God we now have, after His speaking to us through His own Son, and what the generality of saints had under the old covenant. Although their eyes were as sharp and clear as ours, their faith and spiritual understanding no less than ours, and the object of revelation as glorious to them as to us — our day is far clearer than theirs was. The clouds have blown away and scattered, the shadows of night have gone and fled, the sun has risen, and the means of sight are more clear and prominent than they once were. Yet:

2. That particular sight of God which Moses had (Exodus 34) was a Gospel-sight — a sight of God as gracious. And yet it is called only His 'back parts' — that is, low and small in comparison with His excellencies and perfections.

3. The apostle, exalting to the utmost the glory of Gospel light above that of the old covenant — showing that now the veil causing darkness has been removed, so that with unveiled faces we behold the glory of the Lord — tells us how we behold it: 'As in a mirror' (2 Corinthians 3:18). In a mirror — what does that mean? Clearly and perfectly? Alas, no. He tells us what that means (1 Corinthians 13:12): 'We see through a mirror dimly.' He alludes to a looking glass, in which only dim images and reflections of things appear — not the things themselves — and to our sight in that glass, which he compares to our knowledge of God. He also tells us that everything we do see through this glass appears as in a riddle, in darkness and obscurity. Speaking of himself — who was surely far more clear-sighted than anyone now living — he says he saw only in part, only the 'back parts' of heavenly things (verse 12). He compares all the knowledge he had attained of God to a child's understanding (verse 11). We know what weak, vague, uncertain thoughts and ideas children have about anything complex or abstract — and how, when they grow up and their understanding develops, those early notions vanish and they are ashamed of them. It is fitting for a child to love, honor, trust, and obey his father. But as for his understanding and notions, his father knows how childish and mistaken they are. Despite all our confidence about high spiritual attainments, all our notions of God are childish compared to His infinite perfections. We stammer and stumble — saying we know not what, for the most part — even in our most careful and

precise (as we think) thoughts and ideas about God. We may love, honor, trust, and obey our Father — and He accepts our childish thoughts, for they are only childish. We see only His back parts; we know but little of Him. Hence that promise on which we so often rest and are comforted in distress: we shall see Him as He is; we shall see Him face to face; we shall know even as we are known; we shall comprehend that for which we are comprehended (1 Corinthians 15:12; 1 John 3:2). And positively stated: now we do not see Him — all of this confirming that here we see only His back parts, not as He is, but in a dim and obscure representation, not in the perfection of His glory.

The queen of Sheba had heard much about Solomon and formed grand thoughts of his magnificence accordingly — but when she came and saw his glory, she was forced to confess that not even half the truth had been told her. We may suppose we have arrived at great knowledge here — clear and elevated thoughts of God — but when He brings us into His presence, we will cry out that we never knew Him as He is. Not even a thousandth part of His glory, perfection, and blessedness had ever entered our hearts.

The apostle tells us (1 John 3:2) that we do not yet know what we ourselves will be — what we will find ourselves to be in the end. How much less will it enter our hearts to conceive what God is and what we will find Him to be.

First, we know so little of God because He is the One who is to be known — that is, the One who has in large part described Himself to us precisely by the fact that we cannot know Him. What else does He mean when He calls Himself invisible, incomprehensible, and the like? He is the One we do not and cannot know as

He is. Our progress in knowing Him consists more in knowing what He is not than what He is. So He is described as immortal and infinite — meaning He is not as we are: mortal, finite, and limited. Hence this glorious description (1 Timothy 6:16): 'Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.' His light is such that no creature can approach it. He is not seen — not because He cannot be seen in Himself, but because we cannot bear the sight of Him. The light of God — in whom there is no darkness at all — makes access to Him impossible for any creature whatever. We, who cannot even look directly at the sun in its brightness, are far too weak to bear the beams of infinite brightness.

On this basis — as was noted — the wise man confesses himself a brute rather than a man, not possessing human understanding (Proverbs 30:2). That is, he knew nothing in comparison with God — his very understanding seemed to vanish once he came to contemplate God, His works, and His ways. In this consideration, let our souls descend to some particulars.

1. As for God's being: we are so far from knowing it in a way that would allow us to instruct one another through words and expressions, that to form any conception in our minds about it — using the mental images and impressions through which we know all other things — is to make an idol for ourselves, to worship a god of our own making rather than the God who made us. We might as well carve Him out of wood or stone as fashion a conception of His being in our minds suited to our own capacities.

The best and highest thought we can have about God's being is that we can have no real thought of it. It is a very limited kind of knowledge that rises no higher than knowing we do not actually

know it.

2. There are certain things about God that He Himself has taught us to speak of and has given us language to express them with — but even when we speak in these God-given terms, we do not see the realities themselves or truly know them. Believing and marveling is all we attain. We profess — as we are taught — that God is infinite, omnipotent, and eternal. And we know how many debates and ideas there are about omnipresence, immensity, infiniteness, and eternity. We have words and concepts about these things, but as for the things themselves — what do we actually know? What do we actually comprehend? Can the human mind do anything more than swallow itself up in an infinite abyss that is as nothing to it — surrender itself to what it cannot conceive, let alone express? Is our understanding not reduced to nothing in contemplating such things? Is it not as if it had no understanding at all? Indeed, the perfection of our understanding at this point is not to understand — and to rest there. We catch only the faintest glimpse of the back parts of eternity and infiniteness. What shall I say of the Trinity — or the existence of distinct persons in one individual essence? A mystery denied by many because understood by none. A mystery whose every letter is itself a mystery.

Who can explain the eternal generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, or the distinction between Them? The infinite and inconceivable distance that exists between Him and us keeps us in the dark as to any clear sight of His face or any full comprehension of His perfections.

We know Him more through what He does than through what He is — more through His acts of goodness toward us than through His essential goodness itself. And as Job says, how small a

portion of Him is even discovered through this?

Second, we know so little of God because it is only by faith that we know Him here. I will not at this point discuss the residual impressions about the existence of God that remain naturally in all human hearts, or what can be rationally known about God from the works of creation and providence that people observe. It is universally acknowledged — and painfully confirmed by the experience of every age — that this knowledge is so weak, dim, confused, and incomplete that no one has ever truly glorified God on its basis. Despite all their knowledge of God, people have been, in effect, without God in the world.

The main — and practically the only — knowledge we have of God and His ways of making Himself known comes through faith. 'He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him' (Hebrews 11:6). Our knowledge of Him, and of His rewarding of those who seek Him — the very foundation of our obedience and our coming to Him — is belief. 'We walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7). 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1). As to its source, faith rests purely on the testimony of the One it has not seen. As the apostle implies: how can you love the One you have not seen? — meaning, the One you know exists only by faith. Faith receives everything on His testimony and receives Him as real on His own testimony alone. As to its nature, faith is an assent based on testimony, not a certainty based on direct evidence. And its object, as was said, is above us. Hence our faith is described as a seeing dimly as in a glass. Everything we know this way — and everything we know of God we know this way — is dim, dark, and incomplete.

But you may say: all this may be true for those who do not know God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. For those who do know Him this way, it is different. It is true: 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him' (John 1:17-18). And 'The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true' (1 John 5:20).

The light of the glorious Gospel of Christ — who is the image of God — shines upon believers (2 Corinthians 4:4). Indeed, God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give us the knowledge of His glory in the face of His Son (verse 6). Though we were once darkness, we are now light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). The apostle says, 'We all, with unveiled face, are beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror' (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are now so far from living in darkness or at a great distance from God that our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3). The light of the Gospel by which God is now revealed is glorious. Not a star but the sun in its beauty has risen upon us, and the veil has been removed from our faces. So even though unbelievers — and perhaps some weak believers — may remain in some degree of spiritual darkness, those of any maturity or significant growth have a clear sight of the face of God in Jesus Christ.

1. The truth is, all of us know enough of God to love Him more than we do, to delight in Him and serve Him, to believe, obey, and trust in Him far beyond what any of us has yet attained.

Our darkness and weakness is no excuse for our negligence and disobedience. Who among us has lived up to the knowledge he has had of God's perfections, excellencies, and will? God's goal in

giving us any knowledge of Himself here is that we would glorify Him as God — that is, love Him, serve Him, believe and obey Him, and give Him all the honor and glory that is due from poor sinful creatures to a sin-pardoning God and Creator. We must all admit that we have never been fully transformed by the image of the knowledge we have received. And had we used our talents well, we might have been trusted with more.

2. Relatively speaking, the knowledge of God that we have through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Gospel is extraordinarily great and glorious. It is so in comparison with any knowledge of God that could otherwise be obtained, or that was delivered under the old covenant, which had only the shadow of good things, not the clear image of them. The apostle develops this at length (2 Corinthians 3). Christ has now in these last days revealed the Father from His own heart, declared His name, and made known His mind, will, and purposes in a far clearer, more prominent, and more distinct way than He did previously, when He kept His people under the instruction of the law. This is what is chiefly meant in the passages cited earlier: the clear, plain declaration and revelation of God and His will in the Gospel is expressly exalted in comparison with every other mode of revelation.

3. The difference between believers and unbelievers in knowledge lies not so much in the content of what they know as in the manner in which they know it. Unbelievers may in some cases know more about God, His perfections, and His will than many believers — yet they know nothing as they ought. They know nothing in the right way, nothing spiritually and savingly, nothing in a holy and heavenly light. The excellence of a believer lies not in having a large grasp of things, but in this: what he does grasp — which may

be very little — he sees in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving and soul-transforming light. It is this that gives us communion with God, not wide-ranging thoughts or intricate raised notions.

## CHAPTER 14. ACT FAITH ON CHRIST FOR THE KILLING OF SIN



**T**he ninth direction: when the heart is troubled by sin, do not speak peace to it until God speaks it. Peace that is not accompanied by genuine hatred of sin is unsound. So also is peace that we measure out to ourselves. How to know when we are measuring our own peace — directions for that inquiry. The emptiness of speaking peace lightly — also of doing it on one particular ground without universal application.

When God troubles the heart about the guilt of its disorders — whether as to their root and indwelling, or as to some outward eruption of them — take care not to speak peace to yourself before God speaks it. Listen instead for what He says to your soul. This is the next direction, and without following it the heart will be greatly exposed to the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a matter of great importance. It is a terrible thing for a person to deceive his own soul here. All the warnings God gives us in His tenderness toward our souls — urging us to try and examine ourselves — are aimed at preventing this very evil: speaking peace to ourselves without grounds, which amounts in the end to blessing ourselves in defiance of God.

To apply this direction rightly, observe:

(1) Just as it is God's great prerogative and sovereign right to give grace to whom He pleases — 'He has mercy on whom He will' (Romans 9:16), calling whom He will and sanctifying whom He will — so among those He has called, justified, and resolved to save, He reserves this privilege to Himself: to speak peace to whom He pleases and in the measure He pleases, even among those to whom He has given grace. He is the God of all consolation in a special sense in His dealings with believers — that is, the One who holds the good things kept within His family and distributes them to all His children according to His pleasure. The Lord insists on this (Isaiah 57:16-19). The condition being addressed there is the one we are considering. When God says He will heal their wounds and sorrows, He claims this privilege especially for Himself: 'I create it' (verse 19) — even for these wounded creatures, I create peace and give it out as I please.

Therefore, just as God acts in great sovereignty in conferring grace on those who are in a state of nature — taking and leaving, and often in ways that defy all outward expectation — so He also gives out peace and joy to those who are in a state of grace. He distributes them in ways that often run contrary to any apparent pattern we could predict.

(2) Just as God creates peace for whom He pleases, it is Christ's prerogative to speak it home to the conscience. Speaking to the church of Laodicea, who had falsely healed her own wounds and spoken peace to herself when she should not have, Christ takes for Himself the title: 'I am the Amen, the faithful witness' (Revelation 3:14). He bears testimony to our condition as it truly is. We may mistake and trouble ourselves needlessly, or flatter

ourselves on false grounds — but He is the Amen, the faithful witness, and what He says about our state and condition is what it truly is. He is said not to judge by outward appearance or by anything subject to mistake, as we tend to do. He judges and decides every case as it actually is (Isaiah 11:3).

With these two preliminary observations in place, some rules may be given by which people can know whether God is speaking peace to them or whether they are speaking it to themselves.

(1) People are certainly speaking peace to themselves when doing so is not accompanied by the deepest possible hatred and abhorrence of the very sin in connection with which they are speaking peace to themselves. When people have been wounded by sin, troubled and perplexed, and knowing there is no remedy but in God's mercy through the blood of Christ, they look to Him and to the covenant promises in Him. They quiet their hearts with the assurance that it will be well with them and that God will be exalted and be gracious — yet their souls have not been brought to the deepest detestation of the sin or sins that caused the trouble. This is healing themselves, not being healed by God. This is nothing but a great and strong wind — the Lord is near to it, but the Lord is not in the wind. When people truly look on Christ whom they have pierced — without which there is no healing or peace — they will mourn (Zechariah 12:10). They will mourn even on this account and detest the sin that pierced Him. When we go to Christ for healing, faith looks at Him specifically as one who was pierced. Faith takes different views of Christ according to the occasions and forms of communion with Him it has. Sometimes it views His holiness, sometimes His power, sometimes His love, sometimes His favor with His Father. When it goes for healing and peace, it looks

especially at the blood of the covenant — His sufferings. For 'by His stripes we are healed, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him' (Isaiah 53:5). When we look for healing, His stripes are to be in view. When we look for peace, His chastisement must be before our eyes. Now I say: when this is done according to the mind of God and in the strength of the Spirit poured out on believers, it will produce in the soul a detestation of the sin or sins for which healing and peace is sought. So (Ezekiel 16:60-61): 'Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.' And then what? 'You will remember your ways and be ashamed.' When God comes home to speak sure covenant peace, it fills the soul with shame for every way it had been alienated from Him. One of the things the apostle mentions as attending godly sorrow — the kind that leads to salvation and is never regretted — is vengeance (2 Corinthians 7:11): they reflected on their failures with indignation and a spirit of revenge against their own folly. When Job arrives at true healing, he cries out, 'Now I abhor myself' (Job 42:6). Until he did so, he had no lasting peace. He might perhaps have patched himself up with the doctrine of free grace preached so excellently by Elihu (chapter 33, verses 14-29), but that would only have skinned his wounds. He had to come to self-abhorrence before arriving at healing. Let a man make whatever application he will for healing and peace — let him go to the true Physician, go the right way, quiet his heart in the covenant's promises — yet when peace is spoken, if it is not attended with detestation and abhorrence of the sin that caused the wound, that peace is not of God's creating but of our own purchasing. It is only a skinning over of the wound while the corruption lies at the bottom —

festering and eating away until it breaks out again with foulness, trouble, and danger. Let not poor souls who walk in this path — more troubled by the inconvenience of sin than by its pollution or filth; addressing themselves to the Lord in Christ for mercy, but still keeping the sweet taste of their sin under their tongues — let them never expect true and solid peace. For example: you find your heart running after the world, and it disturbs your communion with God. The Spirit says plainly to you (1 John 2:15): 'If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' This moves you to deal with God in Christ for the healing of your soul and the quieting of your conscience. But a thorough detestation of the evil itself does not abide in you — perhaps you actually like the worldliness well enough, and your only concern is the consequences. You may possibly be saved, but as one through fire. God will have some dealings with you before He is done with you. But you will have little peace in this life. You will be sick and faint all your days (Isaiah 57:17). This deceit lies at the root of many professing Christians' peace and wastes it. They deal with all their strength about mercy and pardon, and appear to have deep communion with God in doing so. They lie before Him, lamenting their sins and failings, so that anyone watching — including themselves — would think they have finally parted with their sins and found mercy that satisfies their hearts for a season. But when a careful search is made, there has been some secret reservation for the sin being dealt with. At least there has not been that thorough abhorrence of it that is necessary. Their entire peace quickly turns out to be weak and hollow — barely lasting longer than the words of asking for it are still in their mouths.

(2) When people measure out peace to themselves based on conclusions their own convictions and rational faculties lead them to — this is false peace and will not last. A man has been wounded by sin. He has a conviction of some sin on his conscience; he has not walked in a way that honors the Gospel. All is not right between his soul and God. He now considers what to do. He has enough knowledge and experience to know the path that leads to healing. Knowing that God's promises are the outward means for the healing of his wounds and the quieting of his heart, he goes to them — searches them out, finds one or more whose literal expression directly fits his condition. He says to himself: God speaks in this promise. Here I will take for myself a remedy as long and wide as my wound. He brings the promise to bear on his condition and settles into peace. This is another appearance on the mountain — the Lord is near, but the Lord is not in it. This has not been the work of the Spirit — who alone can convict of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) — but merely the activity of the intelligent rational soul. In the case I am describing, the person acts purely on the principle of conviction and understanding by which his natural faculties have been elevated. But the Spirit does not breathe on any of these waters at all. Consider an instance: suppose the wound and trouble of soul is on account of repeated relapses. Whatever the specific sin may be — however small in matter — there are no deeper wounds than those given on that account, and no greater disturbance. In his turmoil, he finds this promise (Isaiah 55:7): 'The Lord will have compassion, and our God will abundantly pardon' — He will multiply pardon, do it again and again. Or perhaps (Hosea 14:4): 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.' The man considers this and con-

cludes peace for himself — without asking whether the Spirit of God is making the application, without asking whether the Spirit is giving life and power to the letter. He does not listen for whether God the Lord is speaking peace. He does not wait on God — who perhaps is still hiding His face, watching this poor creature stealing peace and running away with it. God knows the time will come when He will deal with him again, call him to a new accounting (Hosea 11:3) — when he will see that it is useless to take a single step without God taking him by the hand.

Various other questions arise from this point, and I cannot address them all. I will speak to one.

The question may be asked: since this seems to be the path the Holy Spirit leads us in for the healing of our wounds and the quieting of our hearts, how shall we know when we are going it alone and when the Spirit is also accompanying us?

1. If any of you are going astray on this account, God will quickly let you know it. Besides the fact that you have His promise that He guides the humble in judgment and teaches them His way (Psalm 25:9), He will not allow you to go on indefinitely in error. He will not let your nakedness be covered with fig leaves — He will strip them away, along with all the peace you found in them. He will not allow you to settle on such empty grounds. You will quickly discover that your wound is not healed. That is: you will soon know whether this is your situation by the result. The peace you obtain in this way will not last. While the mind is overpowered by its own convictions there is no grip for trouble to take hold. Wait a little and all these reasonings will grow cold and collapse before the first temptation that comes along.

2. This course is commonly taken without waiting — yet waiting is the very grace, the specific exercise of faith, that God calls for in such a condition. I know God sometimes comes in on the soul instantly — in a moment, as it were — wounding and healing it. I believe this was the case with David when he cut off the corner of Saul's robe. But ordinarily in such a case God calls for waiting and laboring — attending like a servant's eyes upon his master (Psalm 123:2; Psalm 130:6). The prophet Isaiah says (chapter 8:17): 'I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob.' God will have His children wait at His door for a time when they have run from His house — He will not immediately let them rush back in. Unless He takes them by the hand and draws them in when they are too ashamed to come on their own. People who speak peace to themselves commonly hurry. They will not wait. They do not listen for what God says (Isaiah 28:16) — they press on to be healed.

3. This kind of peace, even if it quiets the conscience and the reasoning mind, does not sweeten the heart with rest and gracious settled comfort. The answer such peace receives is much like what Elisha said to Naaman: 'Go in peace' (2 Kings 5:19). It quieted his mind but gave little of the sweetness that God speaks along with His peace. 'Do not My words do good?' says the Lord (Micah 2:7). When God speaks, there is not only truth in His words that satisfies the understanding — His words do good. They bring something sweet, wholesome, and genuinely welcome to the will and affections. Through them the soul returns to its rest (Psalm 116:7).

4. Worst of all, it does not change the life, heal the evil, or cure the disorder. When God speaks peace, it guides and keeps the soul so that it does not turn back to folly (Psalm 85:8). When we speak

peace to ourselves, the heart is not drawn away from the evil. In fact, this is the readiest way in the world to produce a pattern of repeated backsliding in a soul. If, after plastering yourself with peace, you find yourself energized to return to the battle rather than completely weaned from it — that is clear evidence that you have been at work on your own soul, but Jesus Christ and His Spirit were not there. And often, once the natural energy of the moment has done its work, it will within a few days come back demanding its reward. Having been active in the work of self-healing, it will soon begin to reason in favor of a new wounding. When God speaks peace, it comes with such sweetness and such a revelation of His love that it places a strong and lasting obligation on the soul never to deal perversely again (Luke 22:32).

(3) We speak peace to ourselves when we do it lightly. The prophet complains about some teachers who did this (Jeremiah 6:14): 'They have healed the wound of the daughter of My people lightly.' Some people treat the healing of their wounds as a minor matter — a glance at the promises, a quick look to Christ, and the affair is settled. The apostle tells us that the word did not benefit some people because it was not mixed with faith (Hebrews 4:2) — not properly blended and combined with faith. It is not a mere glance at the word of mercy in the promise that is needed. The promise must be mixed with faith until it is absorbed into the very nature of the soul. Then it truly does the soul good. If you have had a wound on your conscience that came with weakness and disturbance and from which you are now free — how did that happen? 'I looked to the promises of pardon and healing and found peace.' But perhaps you moved too quickly. You did it superficially, without dwelling on the promise long enough to mix it with faith so

that its full virtue was absorbed into your soul. You only skimmed the surface. You will find your wound breaking out again before long, and you will know that you were not truly healed.

(4) Whoever speaks peace to himself on the basis of one thing, while another evil of equal or greater seriousness still lies unaddressed upon his spirit and has never been brought before God — that person is declaring peace when there is none. A man has repeatedly neglected a duty that was clearly his obligation. His conscience is troubled, his soul wounded, he has no rest because of his sin. He applies for healing and finds peace. But all the while, perhaps worldliness, or pride, or some other sin that greatly grieves the Spirit of God lies in that man's heart — undisturbing to him, and undisturbed by him. Let not that man think that any of his peace comes from God.

Things will go well for people only when they have an equal regard for all of God's commandments. God will justify us from our sins, but He will not justify even the smallest sin in us. He is a God of purer eyes than to look on iniquity.

(5) When people speak peace to their consciences on their own, it is seldom accompanied by God speaking humiliation to their souls. God's peace is humbling peace — melting peace. This was perfectly illustrated in the case of David (Psalm 51:1): never was there such deep humiliation as when Nathan brought him news of his pardon.

Question: But when may we receive a promise as our own, in connection with some particular wound, for the quieting of our heart?

1. In general: when God speaks it — sooner or later. He may do it at the very moment of the sin itself, with such irresistible power that the soul has no choice but to receive what He says. Sometimes He will make us wait longer. But whenever He speaks — sooner or later, when we are sinning or when we are repenting, in whatever condition our souls may be — if God speaks, He must be received. There is nothing that the Lord is more troubled with us about in our communion with Him than our unbelieving fears that prevent us from receiving the strong consolation He is so willing to give.

But you will say: we are back where we started. When God speaks it, we must receive it — that is true. But how shall we know when He is speaking?

If only we could all practically arrive at this: to receive peace when we are convinced that God is speaking it and that it is our duty to receive it.

2. There is — if I may say so — a secret instinct in faith by which it recognizes Christ's voice when He truly speaks. As the unborn child leaped in the womb when the blessed virgin came to Elizabeth, faith leaps in the heart when Christ truly draws near to it. 'My sheep know My voice' (John 10:14). They know My voice. They are familiar with the sound of it, and they recognize when His lips are opened to them and are full of grace. The bride in the Song was in a sad state (Song of Solomon 5:2) — asleep in careless security. Yet the moment Christ speaks she cries out, 'That is the voice of my beloved!' She knew his voice. She was so practiced in communion with him that she instantly recognized him. You will do the same: if you exercise yourself in acquaintance and communion with Christ, you will easily tell His voice from the voice of a stranger. And take this with you: when He speaks, He speaks as no

other has ever spoken. He speaks with power, and in one way or another will make your heart burn within you, as He did for the disciples (Luke 24). He does it by putting His hand in at the opening of the door (Song of Solomon 5:4) — sending His Spirit into your heart to take hold of you.

The person who has his senses trained to discern good and evil — who has grown in judgment and experience through consistent observation of the patterns of Christ's working and the Spirit's usual effects — is the best judge for himself in this matter.

2. If the word of the Lord does good to your soul, He is speaking it. If it humbles, if it cleanses, if it serves the purposes for which promises are given — (1) to endear the soul to God, and (2) to cleanse it.

Melting the soul toward obedience, self-emptiness, and so on. But this is not my present focus, and I will not pursue this direction further here. Without observing it, sin will have great advantages toward hardening the heart.

5. The Spirit is the author and finisher of our sanctification; gives new supplies and influences of grace for holiness and sanctification, when the contrary principle is weakened and abated (Ephesians 3:16-18).

6. In all the soul's addresses to God in this condition, it has support from the Spirit. Whence is the power, life and vigor of prayer? whence its efficacy to prevail with God? Is it not from the Spirit? He is the Spirit of supplication promised to them who look on him whom they have pierced (Zechariah 12:10), enabling them to pray with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:16). This is confessed to be the great medium or way of faith's

prevailing with God. Thus Paul dealt with his temptation, whatever it were; I besought God that it might depart from me (2 Corinthians 12:8).

Finis.

## THANKS FOR READING



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