

Conceptual Outline: “On the Mortification of Sin in Believers” by John Owen

compiled by Robert H. Thune, December 2009

John Owen, an English Puritan who lived from 1616-1683, is one of the most influential theologians of all time. He began serving as a pastor at age 21 after receiving his M.A. from Oxford. When this treatise was written in 1656, he was serving as Dean of Christ Church, Oxford's largest college, and also as Vice-Chancellor of the University. **On the Mortification of Sin** is one of his best-loved works. One of the greatest theologians of our own day, J.I. Packer, says, “I owe more to John Owen than to any other theologian, ancient or modern; and I owe more to [The Mortification of Sin] than to anything else he wrote.”

On The Mortification of Sin is a work of pastoral theology. As such, it is perhaps the most helpful and accessible treatise Owen ever wrote. It is not concerned with technical theological questions, but with the most practical of Christian concerns: how can I effectively fight against sin? All who feel the weight of this struggle will be well-served by Owen's pastoral counsel.

Even the most educated scholars find Owen's writing style dense. J.I. Packer agrees that Owen is “heavy and hard to read;” an earlier biographer observed that he “travels through [his subject] with an elephant's grace.” I pray that this outline will spur some readers to read Owen's work firsthand, because despite its cumbersome nature, it is some of the finest theological writing in the English language. But for those who don't wish to do so, the outline below preserves the logical flow of the treatise, summarizes its main points, and includes some of the more insightful quotes from Owen's pen.

Preface: Why is Owen Writing?

1. Professing believers having a hard time dealing with temptation
2. Bad teachers “unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel and the efficacy of the death of Christ” solving this problem by flesh-driven, works-based remedies which cause “superstition, self-righteousness, and anxiety of conscience”
3. Owen is seeking to counteract this by outlining “this work of gospel mortification”
4. “My heart's desire unto God... [is] that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God.”

Section 1: Statement of Thesis and First Principles Regarding the Mortification of Sin

1. **Foundational Text: Romans 8:13.** “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live.”
 - a. Basic exegetical outline of this verse:
 - i) There is a duty prescribed: mortify the deeds of the body.
 - ii) There are persons addressed: if YE mortify.
 - iii) There is a promise given: “ye shall live.”
 - iv) There is a cause of the performance of this duty: “through the Spirit”
 - v) The whole statement is conditional: “IF ye.”
 - vi) Owen will proceed to unfold these five features in the order they appear in the text of the verse.
 - b. First, the conditionality: it establishes a connection between means and end. “There is a certain infallible connection and coherence between true mortification and eternal life: if you use these means, you shall obtain that end. If you do mortify, you shall live.”

- c. Second, the persons to whom this duty is prescribed: “ye,” that is, believers, as clear from 8:1 – those for whom “there is no condemnation.” Therefore, Owen establishes this **main thesis statement** 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.”
- d. Third, the cause of the duty is the Holy Spirit. “All other ways of mortification are vain... it must be done by the Spirit... 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.”
- e. Fourth, we must consider the duty prescribed. “Mortify the deeds of the body.” Owen poses three interpretive questions: 1) what is meant by the body? 2) what is meant by the deeds of the body? 3) what is meant by mortifying them?
 - i) The body = the flesh; that is, “that corruption and depravity of our natures whereof the body, in a great part, is the seat and instrument... it is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust, that is intended.” The body/flesh is also called in Scripture “the old man” and “the body of sin” (Romans 7).
 - ii) The deeds of the body = the outward actions that flow from indwelling sin. BUT: “though the outward deeds are here only expressed, yet the inward and next causes are chiefly intended; the ‘axe is to be laid at the root of the tree,’ – the deeds of the flesh are to be mortified in their causes, from whence they spring.”
 - iii) To mortify = to kill.
 - (1) “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... taken away by the Spirit.”
 - (2) We are crucified with Christ, and thus in one sense the old man is already killed at regeneration, “when a principle contrary to it, and destructive of it, Gal 5:17, is planted in our hearts; but the whole work is by degrees to be carried on towards perfection all our days.”
 - iv) What the apostle intends, then, 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.”
- f. Fifth, the promise unto this duty is life. Therefore: “The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.”
- g. Owen will set up the rest of the discourse by more fully explaining the three main principles he has derived from Romans 8:13.

2. **First general principle (restatement of thesis):** *“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.”*

- a. Statement of other supporting texts: Col 3:5; John 15:2; 1 Cor 9:27
- b. Best one-line quote: “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”
- c. Why does God expect us to be so diligent at this work?
 - i) Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world; therefore we must always be mortifying it.
 - (1) See Phil 3:12; 2 Cor 4:16; 2 Pet 3:18; Gal 5:17; 1 John 1:8; Rom 7:24; Phil 3:21 for biblical proof that indwelling sin is always with us while we remain alive.
 - (2) “It being our duty to mortify... we must be at work. He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, does but half his work.”
 - ii) Sin is not just still abiding; it is still acting, still laboring to bring forth deeds of the flesh. “When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone.”

- (1) Sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. Rom 7:23; James 4:5; Gal 5:17; James 1:14; Heb 12:1.
- (2) "He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance, will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue."
- (3) "Sin foils or is foiled; prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so while we live."
- iii) Sin will bring forth great, scandalous, soul-destroying sins. "Sin aims always at the utmost." Gal 5:19-21.
- iv) The Spirit and a new nature have been given to us so that we might fight sin.
 - (1) "Not to be daily mortifying sin, is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who hath furnished us with a principle of doing it."
- v) Negligence in the work of mortification leads to hard-heartedness; we neglect God's grace to fight sin, and therefore we become cold, worldly, stubborn.
- vi) It is our duty to be "perfecting holiness" (2 Cor 7:1), "growing in grace" (1 Pet 2:2, 2 Pet 3:18), "renewing our inward man day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).
 - (1) "Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who doth not kill sin in this way takes no steps toward his journey's end."
 - (2) "He who finds not opposition from [sin]... is at peace with it, not dying to it."
- d. A Clarifying Restatement of the Thesis, the "first general principle of our ensuing discourse:"
 - i) "Notwithstanding the meritorious mortification, if I may so speak, of all and every sin in the cross of Christ;
 - ii) "notwithstanding the real foundation of universal mortification laid in our first conversion, by conviction of sin, humiliation for sin, and the implantation of a new principle opposite to it and destructive of it;
 - iii) "yet sin doth so remain, so act, and so work in the best of believers, while they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days incumbent upon them."
- e. An honest assessment of the visible church:
 - i) "If vain spending of time, idleness, unprofitableness in men's places, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, selfishness, 1 Cor 1, be badges of Christians, we have them on us and amongst us in abundance."
 - ii) "The good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers, or we are in a sad condition!"
- f. Two Evils are present in every professing Christian who is not mortifying sin:
 - i) Taking sin lightly. "The digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart."
 - (1) "Awakened sinners" under conviction are usually diligent about paying attention to their sin, because they feel it deeply; this brings them to profession of faith.
 - (2) Once they realize the gospel, they can become "weary of duty, for which they have no principle," they begin to neglect their duty in fighting sin. In other words: they misunderstand grace as placing NO duty upon them, instead of as empowering duty.
 - ii) Hardening and deceiving others
 - (1) Hardening them, because they perceive that they are at least as good as professing Christians. They do not see the kind of holiness in Christians that is unattainable by natural moral effort.
 - (2) Deceiving them, by making them think that if they can be as morally good as professing Christians, they have eternal life.

3. **Second general principle:** *“The Holy Spirit only is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are as a thing of nought; and he is the great efficient of it – he works in us as he pleases.”*
- a. Elaborations on this principle
- i) In vain do men seek other remedies for mortification.
 - (1) “popish religion (i.e. Roman Catholicism) consists in mistaken ways and means of mortification.”
 - (2) Vows, orders, fasting, penance, etc – all these are “merely legal duties, without the least mention of Christ or his Spirit.”
 - (3) “The reasons why the Papists can never truly mortify one sin” are:
 - (a) The means they use were never appointed by God for this purpose.
 - (b) Those means that ARE appointed by God are not used in their due place and order. Praying, fasting, watching, meditation, etc “are to be looked on as streams; but they [the Catholics] look on them as the fountain.” They make these things **ends in themselves**, instead of **means** by which we avail ourselves of the Spirit and of faith; as a result, they assume that mortification is accomplished if only one fasts so much, prays so much, etc.
 - (c) “This is the general mistake of men ignorant of the gospel... they [try to mortify] the natural man instead of the corrupt old man.” They make the focus of mortification the physical *body* instead of “the body of sin,” i.e. the flesh.
 - (4) Owen observes that men have a “natural Popery” in them that causes them, when beset by sin, to promise that they’ll never do it again. They are watchful for a season; then they fall back into the same patterns. But “spiritually sick men can not sweat out their distemper by working.”
 - ii) Mortification is a work of the Spirit because:
 - (1) He is promised by God to be given to us for this specific work (Ezek. 36:26).
 - (2) Mortification is a gift purchased for us by Christ, and all the gifts of Christ are communicated to us by the Spirit of Christ.
- b. Questions:
- i) **How** does the Spirit mortify sin?
 - (1) By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh.
 - (2) By consuming the root of lust and sin. Hence he is called a “Spirit of burning” (Is 4:4).
 - (3) By bringing the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith.
 - ii) If mortification is the work of the Spirit, then **why** are we commanded to do it?
 - (1) All graces and good works in us are his. He works in us, for instance, to cause us to pray (Rom 8:26; Zech 12:10); yet we are exhorted to pray. Our obedience is the means of his work.
 - (2) “He works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.”
4. **Third and final general principle:** *“The life, vigour, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.”*
- a. Strength and comfort, power and peace, are what we want! All of our troubles stem from a lack of one of these things.
 - b. Without a constant course of mortification, we won’t have either power or peace.
 - i) That doesn’t mean that mortification *guarantees* power and peace. But we will never have power or peace apart from mortification.

- ii) Biblically, spiritual life, vigor, courage, etc are immediate privileges of our adoption, and so Scripture never explicitly connects them to mortification. But since sin seeks to deprive us of these privileges, only by mortifying sin can we continually experience them.
- iii) Every unmortified sin **weakens the soul**, depriving it of its vigour, and **darkens the soul**, depriving it of its comfort.
 - (1) Unmortified sin weakens the soul (Ps. 38:3). It lays hold on the affections, so that the heart loves something else besides God. And it fills our thoughts, so that we are consumed with contriving ways to satisfy our lusts. And it works itself out in our actions, so we have no time to devote to the things of God.
 - (2) Unmortified sin darkens the soul. It “intercepts all the beams of God’s love and favour. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption.”
- c. Mortification makes room for grace to grow in our hearts. PLANT METAPHOR:
 - i) “The life and vigour of our spiritual lives consists in... the flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts.”
 - ii) “God’s graces still abide in a heart where there is some neglect of mortification; but they are ready to die, Rev. 3:2, they are withering and decaying... But now let the heart be cleansed by mortification, the weeds of lust constantly and daily rooted up... let room be made for grace to thrive and flourish... [and then] every grace will act its part!”

Transition: From General Principles to Practical Instruction

1. Having established these general principles as a foundation, Owen now comes to his “principal intention, of handling some **questions** or **practical cases** that present themselves in this business of mortification of sin in believers.”
2. **Case Study:** suppose a man is a true believer, but finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin – what shall he do? How is he to mortify it?
 - a. In answer to this question, Owen proposes to:
 - i) Show **what it is to mortify any sin**, first negatively and then positively
 - ii) Give **general directions** for such things
 - iii) Draw out the **particulars** whereby this is to be done, in a specific case like the one mentioned.

Practical Question 1: What is it to Mortify Sin?

1. Negatively: What mortifying sin is NOT

- a. To mortify sin is not to utterly kill it, root it out, and destroy it. “It is true that this is what is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished.” You should desire and aim at sin’s utter destruction, while remembering that such victory will not be had in yourself, but only when you are presented complete in Christ.
- b. To mortify sin is not to forsake the practice of it outwardly. Those who do this have “got another heart, that is more cunning; not a new heart, that is more holy.”
- c. To mortify sin is not to have a quiet, sedate nature. “Some men have an advantage by their natural constitution... they are not exposed to unruly passions and tumultuous affections as many others are.” This does not mean they have mortified sin.
- d. To mortify sin is not to divert it. “He that changes pride for worldliness, sensuality for Pharisaism, vanity in himself for contempt of others – let him not think that he has mortified sin... He has changed his master, but he is a servant still.”

- e. To mortify sin is not to experience “occasional conquests” against it.
 - i) When sin erupts in disturbing or shameful ways, we are often so troubled by it that we set ourselves to working against it. Our newfound watchfulness may keep sin from rearing its head for a season, but once it settles down we neglect it.
 - ii) In times of suffering or calamity, people often resolve to make progress against their sins. But once the calamity passes, sin returns again with its former vigor.
2. **Positively:** True mortification of sin consists in **three things**
- a. A habitual weakening of it.
 - i) Every lust is “a strong, deeply rooted, habitual inclination and bent of will and affections toward some actual sin.” But note:
 - (1) A lust in one man may, because of his natural temperament or background, be much stronger than the same lust in another man.
 - (2) Lust gets strength by temptation – temptation awakens lust and gives it new life and power
 - (3) Some lusts are far more discernible in their actings than others. A man must be careful not to consider himself mortified when in reality his lusts are just less scandalous than another man’s.
 - ii) So mortification is the weakening of this habit or inclination so that it shall not rise up and entice us.
 - (1) This is more difficult at the beginning. “When a man first sets on a lust, to deal with it, it struggles with great violence to break loose.”
 - (2) Mortification must focus on the root (the habit or inclination) and not on the fruit (the specific eruption of sin).
 - b. A constant fighting and contending against it.
 - i) Thus, a man must know the besetting lusts and sins of his own heart. “Very many have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with them in their bosoms.”
 - ii) Additionally, a man must be acquainted with the specific methods of his lusts, the way a good fighter studies his enemy. “Spiritual wisdom consists in finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin... to trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings; be able to say, at its most secret actings, ‘This is your old way and course; I know what you aim at.’”
 - iii) A wise Christian “never thinks his lust dead because it is quiet, but labours to give it new wounds, new blows every day” (Col 3:5).
 - c. Success. By success Owen means not just that one avoids sin, but that one is victorious over it, “so that [sin] is not able to hinder his duty nor interrupt his peace.”

Practical Question 2: General Directions for Mortifying Sin

1. *Principle 1: Unless one is a true believer, ingrafted into Christ, he can never mortify sin.*
 - a. “A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit.” And how is the Spirit attained? Through union with Christ.
 - b. Unregenerate people are not to work on mortification, but to seek conversion. Let the soul be first thoroughly converted; then humiliation and mortification will ensue.
 - c. If an unregenerate person seeks to mortify sin without being converted, three errors ensue:
 - i) He is diverted from what is his proper business (seeking conversion)
 - ii) Because mortification of sin is indeed a good thing, a man who sets himself to it will feel good about the state of his own soul, when in reality he is unconverted. His efforts at mortification pacify his soul and keep him from fleeing to Christ.

- iii) When an unconverted person has struggled long against sin, and sees that it is not mortified (because he is striving in his own power instead of with the Spirit), he concludes that all is vain, gives up, and yields himself to sin.
 - d. "To kill sin is the work of living men; where men are dead (as all unbelievers, the best of them, are dead), sin is alive, and will live."
 - e. Mortification is the work of *faith*. And only regenerate people have faith.
 - f. Objection: what should unregenerate men who are convicted of sin do? Should they stop striving against sin, because they aren't able to mortify it? If they did so, wouldn't the world be chaos?
 - i) God forbid! Praise God for his common grace that restrains evil "by manifold ways and means."
 - ii) The word of God does convict; "Let, then, the word be preached, and the sins of men will be rebuked, lust will be restrained, and some oppositions will be made against sin, though that be not the effect aimed at."
 - iii) But we must call unregenerate people to *conversion*. "I take not men from mortification, but put them upon conversion. He that shall call a man from mending a hole in the wall of his house, to quench a fire that is consuming the whole building, is not his enemy!"
 - iv) Advice to preachers: "To break men off particular sins, and not to break their hearts, is to deprive ourselves of advantages of dealing with them."
 - v) This is the problem with the Roman Catholic approach: "they call men to mortification instead of to believing." Owen castigates pastors who "bid men vow to abstain from their sin for a season... Perhaps with great perplexity they keep their word; perhaps not, which increases their guilt and torment. Is their sin at all mortified hereby? ...If such directions should prevail to change men's lives, as seldom they do, yet they never reach to the change of hearts or conditions. They make men hypocrites, not Christians."
2. *Principle 2: Without sincerity and diligence in a **universality of obedience**, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained.*
- a. One will never mortify sin by striving aggressively against a particular sin while being lax in other areas of obedience (reading, prayer, meditation, worship, etc).
 - b. To do so is a form of self-love. "It is evident that you contend against sin merely because of how it troubles *you*." You do not hate sin *as sin*; you hate the particular sin that is besetting you.
 - c. A strong, particular besetting sin or lust commonly issues from a careless, negligent spiritual life in general.
 - i) If you keep a diligent watch over your heart in general, you will be aware of all the lust that lies there, and fight against it.
 - ii) God sometimes allows specific sin to flare up in order to show you your overall negligence. "Was it not a correction to Peter's vain confidence, that he was left to deny his Master?"
 - iii) "He, then, that would mortify any disquieting lust: let him take care to be equally diligent in all parts of obedience, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God, though only one be burdensome to him."

Practical Question 3: Particular Instructions for Mortifying a Besetting Sin or Lust

1. *Consider what dangerous symptoms your lust has attending it.*

[If a lust has any of the symptoms listed below, it cannot be dealt with by an ordinary course of mortification; it requires extraordinary measures. Dangerous Symptoms:]

- a. Inveterateness. (Habitual; firmly established by long persistence).

- b. Secret pleas of the heart to leave this sin alone. Examples:
 - i) When convicted of a sin, you search your heart to find some evidences of good in order to pacify your conscience and convince yourself that you are good.
 - (1) This “is a desperate device of a heart in love with sin.”
 - (2) The Spirit is convicting you so that you will deal with that sin by mortifying it. If a man seeks instead to relieve himself of that conviction, “his condition is very dangerous.”
 - ii) When you apply grace and mercy to an unmortified sin.
 - (1) You are indulging in sin on the account of mercy; this is the “badge of a hypocrite.”
 - (2) You are using the promises of the gospel to fulfill the desires of the flesh.
- c. Frequency of success in sin’s seduction.
 - i) If sin “gets the consent of the will with some delight” – if you are easy prey to temptation without much struggle – you are in a dangerous place.
- d. Fighting against sin only with arguments from punishment.
 - i) If you avoid sin due to fear of embarrassment or hell, you are “sufficiently resolved to do the sin if there were no punishment attending it.”
 - ii) Those who belong to God, by contrast, detest sin as sin. They are motivated not by fear of shame or punishment, but by love for God (2 Cor. 5:14).
- e. An increased struggle with sin due to God’s chastening.
 - i) God sometimes leaves his own under the influence of powerful sin in order to correct them.
 - ii) How would I know if my struggle with a particular sin were due to God chastening me? Answer: examine your heart and your ways. What was your soul like before you fell into this particular sin? Were you guilty of negligence, sloth, unrepentance, poor discipline, etc? “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!”
- f. When your sin has already withstood particular dealings from God against it.
 - i) If you can hear the word of God addressed to your particular sin, and you ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit – if your soul “can cure the wounds it so receives” – it is in a dangerous condition.
- g. An important caution: though these forms of hardening *can* be present in true believers, no one who sees these things in himself should conclude that he is truly regenerate! “He that hath these things in himself may safely conclude, ‘If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one.’ But he must look for other evidences [that he is truly regenerate] if he wishes to have peace.”

2. *Get a clear and abiding sense upon your mind of the **guilt**, **danger**, and **evil** of your sin. Be much in meditation of these things. Cause your heart to dwell on them. Let them begin to have a powerful influence on your soul, until they make it tremble.*

- a. Of the **guilt** of it: stop telling yourself it really isn’t that bad.
 - i) There is more evil in YOUR sin – because you know grace in your heart – than in the sin of someone who has no grace at all.
 - ii) God sees the evil in your heart.
- b. Of the **danger** of it: which is manifold...
 - i) The danger of being hardened by its deceitfulness (Heb 3:12-13).
 - ii) The danger of God’s temporal discipline.
 - iii) The danger of losing spiritual peace and strength.
 - iv) The danger of eternal destruction!

- (1) "God... will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin; so that while any one lies under an abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God are to be held out to him." See Heb 3:12 and 10:38.
 - (2) The one who is entangled in sin can have no clear evidence of "his interest in the covenant" – i.e. of his salvation.
- c. Of the **evil** of it. Danger concerns what is to come; evil concerns the present.
- i) It grieves the Holy Spirit. "As a tender and loving friend is grieved at the unkindness of his friend... so is it with this tender and loving Spirit, who hath chosen our hearts for a habitation to dwell in."
 - ii) The Lord Jesus is wounded afresh by it. Every harboring of sin he came to destroy wounds and grieves him.
 - iii) It takes away a man's usefulness. His efforts will not be blessed by God. His ministry will be unfruitful.
3. *Load your conscience with the guilt of your besetting sin.*
- a. Take God's method: begin with generals, and then descend to particulars.
 - i) Generally: bring the holy law of God into your conscience, lay your corruption against it, and pray that you will be affected. If your conscience "invents shifts and evasions" to avoid the condemnation of the law, then tell your conscience:
 - (1) That as long as unmortified sin is in your heart, you have no evidence to prove you are free from the law's condemnation.
 - (2) That the proper work of the law is to discover sin by holding up a mirror. If the law does this for you, and you deny to deal with it, "it is not through faith, but through the hardness of your heart and the deceitfulness of sin." In fact, this is how many people fall away from the faith. They consider themselves "free from the law," so they no longer measure their sin against it; and losing conviction of sin, they turn into all sorts of sin and abomination.
 - ii) Bring your lust to the gospel for further conviction. "What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How shall I hold my head up with any boldness before him? ...Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation – I have despised them all."
 - b. Descend to particulars: consider all the specific truths of the gospel and how your lust and sin defies them.
 - i) Consider the infinite patience of God, and how your sin tests his patience.
 - ii) Consider how close you are to being hardened by sin.
 - iii) Consider all God's gracious dealings with you: his "providential dispensations, deliverances, afflictions, mercies, enjoyments," etc.
 - c. Keep loading your conscience with these truths to deepen your sense of guilt. "While your conscience has any means to alleviate the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt its mortification."
4. *Get a constant longing for deliverance from the power of sin.*
- a. "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... unless you *long* for deliverance you shall not have it."
5. *Consider whether your particular besetting sin is rooted in your nature – that is, whether you are particularly prone to this sin because of your personality or disposition.*
- a. If you are – this doesn't make you any less guilty!

- b. This should awaken your zeal. “So great an advantage is given to sin and Satan by your temper and disposition, that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence, they will prevail against your soul.”
 - c. If your sin/lust is rooted in your nature/personality/disposition, one remedy is particularly important: the subjugation of your natural body through disciplines of fasting, meditation, prayer, and the like (1 Cor 9:27).
 - i) These things are not ends in themselves, but only means toward the end of mortifying sin (contra the Roman Catholics).
 - ii) These disciplines are not to be looked to as powerful in and of themselves, but as vehicles whereby the Spirit gives strength for the accomplishing of his work.
 - iii) Misunderstanding this has led to a view of mortification “among the Papists that may be better applied to horses and other beasts of the field than to believers.”
6. *Consider what occasions your sin uses to exert itself, and watch against them all.*
- a. “Consider what ways, what companies (friends), what opportunities, what studies, what businesses, what conditions, give advantage to your lusts,” and set yourself intentionally against them all.
 - b. People do this all the time with bodily infirmities – specific diets, avoiding allergens, etc. “Are the things of the soul of less importance?”
7. *Fight strongly against the first actings of your lust; do not give allowance for it to get any traction. “Sin is like water in a channel – if it once breaks out, it will have its course.”*
8. *Dwell on thoughts that humble you and remind you of your sinfulness.*
- a. Think much about the excellence and majesty of God, and of your infinite distance from him.
 - b. Think much about your unacquaintedness with him. Prov. 30:2-4. How little you know of God! Even those who walk most intimately with him know but a fraction of what he is like. “We speak much of God... the truth is, we know very little of him.”
 - c. Objection: but don’t we who know Christ through the gospel know God accurately and clearly?
 - i) No: even new covenant Christians “see through a glass, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12).
 - ii) Additionally, God is incomprehensible; no one can see him (1 Tim 6:16).
 - iii) Think about the *being* of God... how mysterious he is!
 - iv) We know what God has told us about himself, but even these things we know by faith and not by sight. What does it mean to be omnipresent, infinite, eternal? We know these things by analogy; but not by experience.
 - v) The difference between a believer and an unbeliever is “not so much in the *matter* of their knowledge as in the *manner* of knowing. Unbelievers... know nothing as they ought, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually and savingly, nothing with a holy, heavenly light. The excellency of a believer is, not that he has a large apprehension of things, but that what he *does* apprehend... he sees in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light.”
 - d. Summary: a due apprehension of God’s greatness, and of our infinite distance from him, shall fill our souls with a holy fear of him, so as to keep lust from thriving.
9. *Do not speak peace to yourself before God speaks peace to you.*

- a. It is God's prerogative, not yours, to speak peace. We may flatter ourselves falsely; but what God speaks about our condition is what is true.
- b. How can I know whether God is speaking peace to me, or whether I am speaking peace to myself?
 - i) Men speak peace to themselves when that peace does not come with a deep detesting and abhorring of their sin.
 - ii) Men speak peace to themselves when their peace is based on rational conclusions and reasoning and not on deep inner conviction.
 - (1) Objection: But is not our intellectual reasoning (finding promises in Scripture which speak to our situation, etc) part of the Spirit's means for comforting our hearts?
 - (2) Answer: yes. But the difference is: God's peace often comes to us after *waiting*. "God will have his children lie a while at his door when they have run from his house." Biblical image: Adam and Eve sewing fig leaves for a makeshift covering instead of waiting for God's pardon and peace.
 - iii) Men speak peace to themselves when they do it slightly – as a bandage and not a cure, healing their surface grief but not the root of their sin problem.
 - iv) Men speak peace to themselves when they experience "healing" from one sin while others lie unmortified in their souls. "God will justify us *from* sin, but he will not justify the least sin *in* us."
 - v) Men speak peace to themselves when such peace is not accompanied by deep humility. "God's peace is a humbling peace, a melting peace."
- c. Objection: we're back to where we started. It's all well and good that we must let God speak peace to us, and not do so ourselves; but how do we know when GOD is speaking?
 - i) Answer: "There is, if I may so say, a secret instinct in faith, whereby it knows the voice of Christ when he speaks indeed... If you exercise yourselves to acquaintance and communion with him, you will easily discern between his voice and the voice of a stranger."

Final Instructions: General Use of the Foregoing Directions (Chapter 14)

1. *Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin.*

- a. Question: how?
 - i) By faith, fill your soul with the consideration of the fullness that is in Jesus. In him, you are provided with all you need for the work of killing sin.
 - ii) By faith, expect Christ to help you succeed.
 - (1) Question: What ground do I have to expect this?
 - (2) Answer:
 - (a) You have no other hope – either your sin will be conquered by Christ, or it will not be conquered.
 - (b) Jesus says "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5); mortification of sin is a work of grace, and he has promised to give us grace out of his fullness of grace (John 1:16).
 - (3) Consider Christ's mercifulness, tenderness, and kindness as our Great High Priest. He pities us in our distress (Heb 4:15-16).
 - (4) Consider his faithfulness to his promises.
 - (5) Expecting Christ to help us in our fight against sin has two eminent advantages:
 - (a) It moves him to assist us quickly, for he is pleased with faith.
 - (b) It engages our heart to be diligent about using the means that Christ uses to communicate himself to our souls (prayer, Scripture, etc).

- b. Set faith peculiarly upon the death, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, on Christ as crucified and slain.
 - i) His aim in dying was to deliver us from sin; hence all the language in Scripture about us being “cleansed by his blood.”
 - ii) “Christ by his death destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us, hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.”
 - c. As you set your faith on Christ’s death, expect power and strive to be conformed to his death (Phil 3:10, Col. 3:3).
2. *Remember that this whole work of mortifying sin is effected, carried on, accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all its parts and degrees.*
- a. The Spirit alone convinces the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the sin to be mortified. And this is the first thing the Spirit does in order to move us to mortification: convince our soul of the evil of it.
 - b. The Spirit alone reveals to us the fullness of Christ for our relief (1 Cor 2:8).
 - c. The Spirit alone establishes an expectation of relief from Christ (2 Cor 1:21).
 - d. The Spirit alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power; for by the Spirit we are baptized into the death of Christ.
 - e. The Spirit alone is the author and finisher of our sanctification; He gives us grace to strive for holiness.
 - f. The Spirit supports and empowers our appeals to God (Romans 8:26).