

john owen mortification of sin

john owen mortification of sin is a phrase that resonates deeply within Christian theological circles, referring to the profound and influential work by Puritan theologian John Owen. This seminal treatise explores the vital Christian discipline of actively combating indwelling sin. Owen's insights are not merely historical curiosities; they offer timeless, practical guidance for believers seeking to live a life more pleasing to God. This article delves into the core concepts of Owen's "Mortification of Sin," examining its theological underpinnings, its practical application, and its enduring relevance for contemporary Christians. We will explore the nature of sin as Owen understood it, the necessity of mortification, the means by which it is accomplished, and the ultimate goal of this spiritual warfare.

Understanding John Owen's Mortification of Sin: A Puritan Masterpiece

The Significance of "The Mortification of Sin" in Christian Literature

John Owen's "The Mortification of Sin" stands as a cornerstone of Puritan literature and a profound exploration of the believer's ongoing struggle against sin. Published in the 17th century, this work continues to be a vital resource for those seeking to understand and actively engage in the process of spiritual growth. Owen, known for his rigorous theological analysis and pastoral wisdom, presents a systematic and comprehensive approach to the Christian life, emphasizing the necessity of actively putting sin to death. The book's enduring appeal lies in its biblical fidelity and its practical, actionable advice for believers facing the persistent reality of indwelling sin.

Theological Foundation of Owen's Approach to Mortification

At its heart, Owen's doctrine of mortification is deeply rooted in the biblical understanding of salvation and sanctification. He argues that while believers are declared righteous through faith in Christ and are freed from the dominion of sin, the presence of sin remains within them. This indwelling sin, often referred to as the "old man" or the "flesh," continues to exert a corrupting influence. Owen's theology emphasizes that mortification is not a means to earn salvation, but rather a vital outflow of a redeemed life, a necessary consequence of union with Christ. It is the believer's active participation in the victory Christ has already won over sin and death. Understanding this theological distinction is crucial to grasping the essence of Owen's teaching.

Key Concepts in John Owen's "Mortification of Sin"

Defining Sin and Its Persistent Nature

Owen meticulously defines sin not just as outward actions, but as a pervasive corruption of human nature, originating from the fall of Adam. He distinguishes between the guilt of sin (which is removed by Christ's atonement) and the indwelling power or principle of sin. This indwelling sin, according to Owen, is a deeply rooted inclination towards evil that remains in the believer's heart even after regeneration. It is a formidable enemy, constantly seeking opportunities to manifest itself in thoughts, desires, and actions that dishonor God. This persistent nature of sin requires constant vigilance and a deliberate, ongoing effort from the believer.

The Necessity of Mortification for the Believer

Owen forcefully argues that mortification is not an optional discipline but a command from God and a

mark of genuine faith. He asserts that to neglect the active suppression of sin is to grieve the Holy Spirit, weaken one's spiritual life, and ultimately fail in obedience. Mortification, for Owen, is essential for the flourishing of the Christian life, enabling believers to draw nearer to God, experience greater joy in their salvation, and bear effective witness to the world. It is the practical outworking of the believer's death to sin and life in Christ, as described in Romans 6.

The Active Nature of Mortification: "Putting Sin to Death"

The phrase "putting sin to death" captures the active, even aggressive, stance Owen advocates. This is not a passive hoping that sin will diminish, but a deliberate and determined effort to starve and weaken its power. Owen employs vivid metaphors to illustrate this concept, portraying sin as a venomous serpent or a fierce enemy that must be relentlessly pursued and subdued. This active engagement involves recognizing sin's subtle workings, identifying its root, and applying the spiritual weapons God has provided. It is a lifelong warfare that requires constant renewal of one's commitment and reliance on divine strength.

The Means of Mortification According to John Owen

The Centrality of the Holy Spirit's Power

While emphasizing the believer's responsibility, Owen never divorces mortification from the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit. He clearly states that the efficacy of mortification is entirely dependent on the Spirit's indwelling presence and power within the believer. It is the Spirit who enables the believer to resist temptation, to overcome sinful desires, and to grow in holiness. Owen's teaching encourages believers to depend wholly on the Spirit, seeking His strength and guidance in the daily battle against sin. This reliance on divine power is the bedrock of all true spiritual progress.

The Role of Faith and Union with Christ

Faith in Christ and the believer's union with Him are presented by Owen as the foundational means for mortification. Because Christ died to sin and rose again, believers, through faith, are united to Him in His death and resurrection. This union means that sin no longer has dominion over them. By exercising faith, believers can reckon themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, drawing strength from this spiritual reality. This active believing in the finished work of Christ enables them to live out the implications of their new identity and overcome the power of sin.

Practical Applications and Disciplines for Mortification

Owen outlines several practical disciplines that are essential for the effective mortification of sin. These are not merely external rituals but are means through which the Spirit works to transform the believer's heart and life. His counsel includes:

- **Self-examination:** Diligently probing one's own heart to identify the specific sins that are being indulged.
- **Prayer:** Constant and fervent prayer for strength, wisdom, and deliverance from sin.
- **Meditating on the Word:** Deeply considering and applying biblical truths to the mind and will.
- **Abstinence from Occasions of Sin:** Avoiding people, places, and activities that commonly lead to sin.
- **Watchfulness:** Maintaining constant vigilance against the subtle encroachments of sin.
- **Pursuit of Holiness:** Actively cultivating godly virtues and striving for conformity to Christ.

Enduring Relevance of John Owen's Mortification of Sin

Owen's Work for the Contemporary Christian

In an age often characterized by a diluted understanding of sin and a diminished emphasis on spiritual discipline, John Owen's "Mortification of Sin" offers a potent antidote. His clear articulation of the reality and destructiveness of indwelling sin, coupled with his robust, biblically grounded strategy for combating it, remains profoundly relevant. Believers today, like those in Owen's time, face constant temptation and the subtle allure of sin. Owen's insights provide a framework for a rigorous yet hopeful engagement with this lifelong struggle, encouraging a deeper pursuit of holiness and a more impactful Christian life.

The Unchanging Battle Against Sin

The nature of indwelling sin, as described by Owen, has not changed. The enemy remains the same, though its methods may adapt to the times. Therefore, Owen's theological framework and practical advice retain their power. The emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the believer's active responsibility are timeless principles for spiritual warfare. Understanding and applying Owen's teachings on mortification equips believers to fight the good fight of faith with greater clarity, conviction, and perseverance, leading to a more Christ-like character and a more fruitful walk with God.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is John Owen's central thesis in 'The Mortification of Sin'?

John Owen's central thesis is that believers are called to actively and diligently put to death the sins remaining in them through the power of the Holy Spirit, not as a means of earning salvation, but as a necessary evidence and fruit of their union with Christ.

What does John Owen mean by 'mortification' in this context?

Mortification, for Owen, refers to the process of weakening, subduing, and ultimately killing sinful desires and actions within the believer. It's not a one-time event but a continuous spiritual discipline.

Why is mortification so important according to Owen?

Owen argues that mortification is crucial because unmortified sin grieves the Holy Spirit, hinders spiritual growth and communion with God, and can lead to spiritual decay and even apostasy. It's essential for maintaining a vibrant Christian life.

What are the primary means Owen suggests for mortification?

Owen emphasizes the use of spiritual disciplines, including prayer, diligent study of Scripture, meditation on God's promises, confession of sin, and actively avoiding occasions of sin. He stresses that these are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

How does Owen connect mortification to the indwelling Holy Spirit?

Owen teaches that the Holy Spirit is the active agent in mortification. Believers are to 'live by the Spirit' and rely on His power to overcome sin, not on their own strength or willpower.

Does Owen's teaching on mortification imply that Christians can

perfectly overcome sin in this life?

No, Owen does not teach sinless perfection in this life. He acknowledges that believers will still be tempted and may sin, but the direction of their lives is towards the death of sin, not its dominion.

What are some common misunderstandings of Owen's 'Mortification of Sin'?

Common misunderstandings include viewing mortification as a works-based salvation, an extreme asceticism, or an endeavor to achieve perfect sinlessness. Owen's emphasis is on the Spirit's work in a life of ongoing battle against sin.

How is Owen's teaching on mortification relevant to Christians today?

Owen's teaching remains profoundly relevant as it provides a robust, biblically grounded framework for understanding and combating sin in a culture that often downplays its seriousness. It encourages intentionality and reliance on God's power for spiritual victory.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to John Owen's Mortification of Sin, with each title beginning with "":

1. Inner Warfare: The Battle for the Believer's Soul

This book delves into the pervasive nature of indwelling sin within the Christian life, exploring its deceptive power and insidious influence. It builds upon Owen's foundational understanding of the believer's ongoing struggle against carnal corruption, offering practical biblical strategies for achieving victory. Readers will find encouragement and clarity on how to actively engage in the mortification of sin.

2. The Taming of the Tongue: Controlling the Unruly Member

Drawing from Owen's emphasis on the sins of the tongue, this work addresses the significant impact

of speech on spiritual growth and purity. It examines the destructive potential of gossip, slander, and careless words, and provides biblical principles for bridling this powerful yet easily misused faculty. The book aims to equip believers to use their speech for God's glory.

3. Spiritual Diligence: The Pursuit of Godly Living

This title reflects Owen's call to active, persistent effort in the pursuit of holiness, directly linking it to the process of mortification. It outlines the vital disciplines and attitudes required for a life characterized by spiritual vitality and the consistent suppression of sinful desires. The book encourages a proactive engagement with God's grace to overcome sin.

4. The Anatomy of Pride: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Exaltation

Focusing on a sin Owen frequently addressed, this book dissects the roots and manifestations of pride in the Christian life. It explores how pride hinders spiritual progress and fuels other corruptions, providing a thorough biblical analysis of its destructive nature. Readers will learn to identify and combat this pervasive sin through humble dependence on God.

5. The Warfare Within: Conquering the Fleshly Lusts

This title directly echoes Owen's central theme of an internal spiritual conflict against ungodly desires. It offers a detailed examination of the carnal mind's resistance to God's will and the strategies necessary to subdue these lusts. The book is a practical guide for those seeking to live a life free from the dominion of sin.

6. The Power of the Cross: Mortification Through Christ's Sacrifice

This book explores how the atonement of Christ provides the ultimate means and motivation for the mortification of sin. It highlights the believer's union with Christ and the enabling power of His death and resurrection for overcoming sinful tendencies. The title points to the centrality of Christ's work in the believer's ongoing spiritual battle.

7. Victorious Living: The Believer's Call to Sanctification

Emphasizing the positive outcome of Owen's teachings, this title focuses on the goal of a progressively holy life. It presents sanctification not as a passive state but as an active pursuit empowered by God,

rooted in the mortification of sin. The book provides encouragement and a biblical framework for a life of increasing conformity to Christ.

8. The Deceitfulness of Sin: Recognizing and Resisting Temptation

This title directly addresses one of Owen's core concerns: the cunning and deceptive nature of sin. It explores how sin masquerades as good and how believers can develop discernment to resist its allure and power. The book offers practical wisdom for navigating the landscape of temptation and avoiding its traps.

9. The Perseverance of Saints: Enduring Faith in the Face of Sin

Connecting mortification to the doctrine of perseverance, this book addresses the long-term nature of the spiritual battle. It provides assurance and encouragement to believers who are striving to overcome sin, emphasizing God's faithfulness in preserving them through the ongoing struggle. The title points to the enduring work of grace in the life of the consistent Christian.

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