

HEROES OF THE CHURCH: John Owen

"[Christ's] blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet."

- John Owen



I. Review of Puritanism

"Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal and evangelism, and spiritual revival...The Puritan goal was to complete what England's Reformation began: to finish reshaping Anglican worship, to introduce effective church discipline into Anglican parishes, to establish righteousness in the political, domestic, and socio-economic fields, and to convert all Englishmen to a vigorous evangelical faith."

- J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 28.

II. Praise for John Owen

A. J.I. Packer says of Owen:

"He is by common consent not the most versatile, but the greatest among Puritan theologians. For solidity, profundity, massiveness and majesty in exhibiting from Scripture God's ways with sinful mankind there is no one to touch him." (*A Quest for Godliness*, 81)

B. Sinclair Ferguson writes:

"...To have known the pastoral ministry of John Owen during these years (albeit in written form) has been a rich privilege; to have known Owen's God an even greater one." (*John Owen on the Christian Life*, x-xi)

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Heb 13:7)

III. The Life of Owen (1616-1683)

A. Born in England in 1616, same year Shakespeare died, four years before Pilgrims sailed of New England.

1. Entered Queens College, Oxford, at 12. B.A. at 16, M.A. at 19.

B. Conversion

1. At 26, went with his cousin to hear the famous preacher at St. Mary's Church. A substitute preached on Matt 8:26 ("And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?")

C. Marriage

1. At 28, married Mary Rooke, for 31 years. Had 11 children.

D. County Preacher Goes Before Parliament

1. Became a pastor of a small church in 1643, later invited by Parliament to preach.
2. Recruited by Oliver Cromwell to be his military chaplain.

Cromwell to Owen, "Sir, you are a person I must be acquainted with."
Owen's reply, "That will be much more to my advantage than yours."

3. Dean of Christ's Church (largest college at Oxford), then Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University.
4. Relieved of duties when Charles II regained English throne. More Puritan persecution.

- E. Owen died on August 24, 1683. Buried in Bunhill Fields, London, near the “tinker”.

“I am glad to hear it; but O brother Payne! The long wished-for day has come at last, in which I shall see the glory in another manner than I have ever done, or was capable of doing in this world...I am going to Him whom my soul has loved, or rather who has loved me with an everlasting love—which is the whole ground of my consolation...I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm; but whilst the great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live, and pray, and hope, and wait patiently, and do not despond; the promise stands invincible, that He will never leave us, nor forsake us.”

IV. Owen’s Life-Encompassing Purpose: Holiness

“[M]y heart’s desire unto God, and the chief design of my life...are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God.”

- A. **Mortification of Sin** = The universal obligation and daily business of true believers to habitually weaken our deep-rooted lust for sin. This is accomplished by our constantly fighting against it, our most relentless enemy, to repeatedly kill indwelling sin, only as we look for relief from the cross of Christ and the power of His promised Spirit, and so receive the life promised in the Gospel.

1. The Practice of Mortification

- a) Diligently pursue the means of grace - *“Since indwelling sin always abides in the believer, we always need to mortify it...sin does not only abide with us, but it continually labors to bring forth the deeds of the flesh...sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. To dare to stand still is to lose the battle.”*
- b) Fight against sin in God’s strength, not your own - *“Mortification is only accomplished ‘through the Spirit’...many attempt to do this based on other principles and in other ways. But this is the work of the Spirit; by Him alone it is wrought. No other power can accomplish it. Mortification based on human strength, carried out with man-made schemes, always ends in self-righteousness.”*
- c) Positively pursue holiness - *“Growing, thriving and improving in universal holiness is the great way of the mortification of sin. The more vigorous the principle of holiness is in us, the more weak, infirm and dying will be that of sin.”*
- d) Have much personal communion with God - *“Christ is our best friend, and ere long will be our only friend. I pray God with all my heart that I may be weary of everything else but converse and communion with Him.”* - Owen to a friend while ill in 1674

V. Recommended Further Reading

- A. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, edited by J. Taylor and K. Kopic (contains “Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers,” “Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It,” and “Indwelling Sin”)
- B. *Communion with the Triune God*, edited by J. Taylor and K. Kopic
- C. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen
- D. *The Enemy Within*, by Kris Lungaard (small paperback adapted from “Of the Mortification of Sin”)