

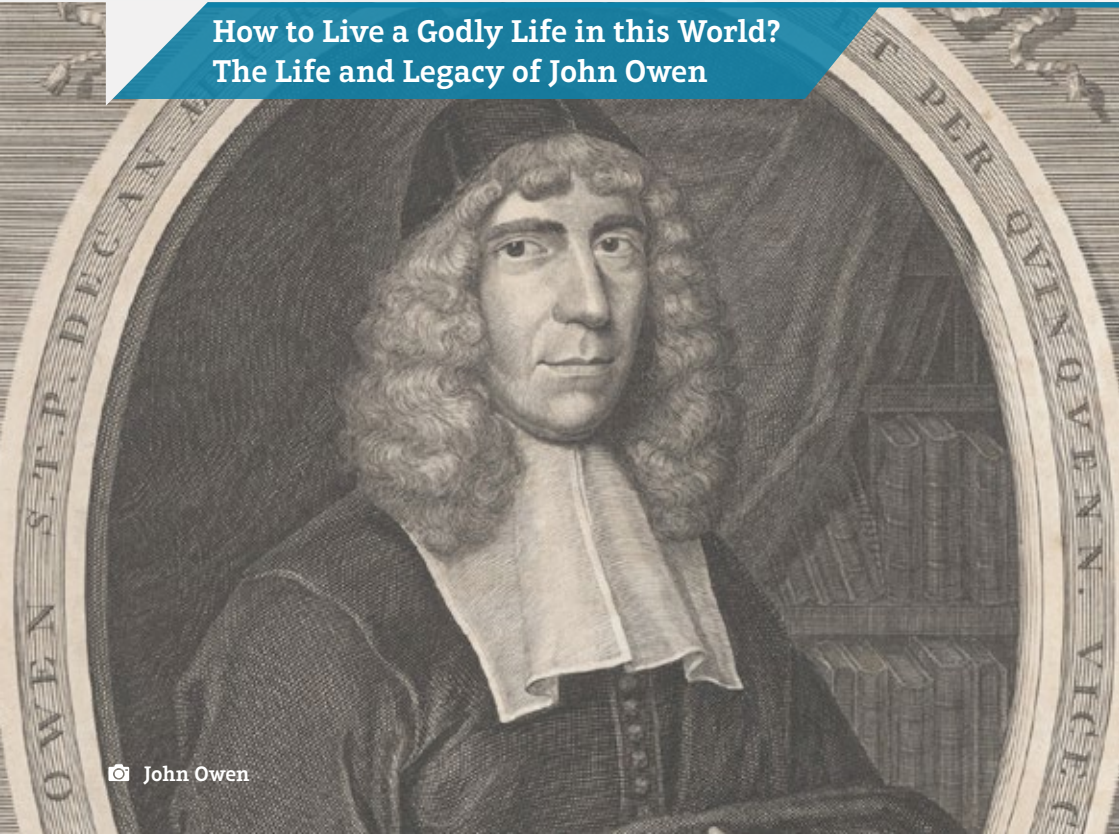
# REFORMATION TODAY

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**JOHN OWEN**  
(1616-1683)

- ▶ Four Centuries of Influence
- ▶ His Writings, and Views on Assurance of Faith
- ▶ Trinitarian Legacy
- ▶ Puritan Advocate for Fighting Sin

**How to Live a Godly Life in this World?**  
**The Life and Legacy of John Owen**



## Editorial

# How to Live a Godly Life in this World?

David raises a crucial question in Psalm 11 that is extremely relevant in our current world: 'If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?' (Ps 11:3). The foundations of life in our current world are being challenged, debated, and attacked in all kind of ways. With increasing frequency we are woken up to the same crude facts that David refers to.

As I am writing this, the attack in Nice, France, by a terrorist killing more than 80 people is only days ago. This event was the next in a series of similarly brutal attacks in other places.

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At the same time there is unusual political turmoil in various countries, some of which until recently looked very stable. All of these matters raise important debates about what kind of society we live in or want to have. The foundations are shaking. What principles should order and structure our life in this world? What can the righteous do in a situation like this?

David, guided by the Holy Spirit, gives several answers in this psalm: The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven. He reminds us that our sovereign Lord is in control of this world. God hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. David points to God's righteous judgments. And he ends with a promise: 'The upright shall behold his face.' How can this be true for us and comfort us, knowing that we are all sinful people?

The answer is developed and revealed in Scripture and culminates in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is that God justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5)! How can it be that God hates the wicked, but can also justify the ungodly? The answer is what God himself has done in and through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his birth, his sinless life and in his suffering and death on the cross bearing the penalty for our sins. This is all because of God's love and grace for undeserving sinners. God justifies sinners through faith in Christ alone.

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WORLD.

In this way, God 'might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom 3:26). This is the only way we will be able to see God's face. As Paul says: 'We all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18). This is the transformation all human beings so desperately need. Ultimately, this is the only answer to the question of David in Psalm 11:3. What can the righteous do? Turn to the Lord, confess our sins, and trust in him alone. This will allow us to begin to live godly and upright lives and pursue justice also in the public sphere.

This brings us to the Puritan John Owen who was born 400 years ago this year. We are profoundly grateful for the material on the life and legacy of John Owen, that our associate editor Dr Michael Haykin has pulled together with the help of several other authors.

John Owen also lived in troubled times, as the sketch of his life makes clear. By God's grace, he was enabled to live a godly life even though he did not see all the fruit of his labours in his lifetime. This encourages us to be faithful. John Owen points us to Scripture and to the Triune God as the only way to live a godly life in this troubled world. May our Lord bless us all and give us grace to walk this way! ■

BOB DAVEY



## An exposition of John 19:25-30

This article is an exposition of John 19:25-30 taking into account the texts from the Synoptic Gospels to give an overview of Jesus' sayings from the cross.

### Jesus' sayings from the cross: an overview

Jesus spoke seven times while on the cross. Three of the sayings are recorded by John alone. The seven sayings recorded in the four Gospels are:

1. 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' (Luke 23:34).
2. 'Woman, behold your son!' ... 'Behold your mother!' (John 19:26,27).
3. 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43).
4. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34).
5. 'I thirst!' (John 19:28).
6. 'It is finished!' (John 19:30).
7. 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46).



The seven sayings fall naturally into two groups.

The first group of three show that Jesus loved his neighbour as himself to the end of his life. They were spoken during the three hours before darkness came over the land (9.00am to noon; compare Mark 15:25 and Matt 27:45). Firstly, Jesus prays for the salvation of his enemies. By doing so he practises what he had preached (Matt 5:44). Secondly, Jesus cares for his mother. By doing so he is honouring the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12). Thirdly, Jesus promises salvation to the repentant robber.

The second group of four showed that Jesus loved God with all his heart. They were spoken during the three hours of darkness (noon to 3.00pm) emphasising that Jesus became the sin-bearer. He demonstrated his love toward the Lord his God, his Father, by subjecting himself completely to his Father's will.

To the end of his earthly life Jesus fulfilled his duty towards both God and man. The whole moral law of God, summed up in the Ten Commandments, was kept perfectly by Jesus. Without this perfect obedience to the law of God, Jesus could not have been the Saviour from sin. He had to be sinless in order to bear the sins of others as their substitute.

### ***The order of the first three sayings***

While Jesus was praying for his enemies (the first saying) he would have seen his mother and the apostle John. It is unthinkable that he would have waited very long before ministering to his

mother in her overwhelming grief (the second saying).

Jesus' words to the robber (the third saying) must have been given after some period of time had elapsed. To start with, both robbers joined in the taunts of chief priests, rulers, Pharisees, soldiers, and other onlookers (Matt 27:39-44; Luke 23:35-37). Later on, one of the robbers had a change of heart, though the other robber continued to blaspheme (Luke 23:39-41). The robber who had a change of heart had faced up to the fact that he was about to meet God. By the grace of God he came to believe in Jesus. In order for this to happen, the robber must have thought carefully about all the things which he had heard and seen while he was on the cross.

He then makes his plea to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. Jesus replies, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:42-43). It is fitting that Jesus' last words before the supernatural darkness came, should be these words of salvation. In his further sayings, the focus shifts to the task of sin-bearing which would produce the very salvation which he had just promised!

### **The women at the crucifixion (John 19:25)**

*19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus. Many of the band of women from Galilee had come up at that time to Jerusalem*

with Jesus and his disciples (Mark 15:40,41). Mary the mother of Jesus had come also. At first they all stood at a distance from the cross (Matt 27:55). Then four women drew near to the cross, together with the apostle John.

*his mother.*

Mary the mother of Jesus stood by the cross. She had to be there. Her love was as strong as death. She was also a woman of deep piety. She had been there at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Cana (John 2:1-12). She had kept in her heart the events surrounding the birth of her son all through the years (Luke 2:51). How could she ever forget? Not least she would have remembered the prophecy of Simeon, given in the temple at Jerusalem at the time of the dedication of Jesus to God. 'Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also' (Luke 2:35). That prophecy was now being fulfilled.

*his mother's sister.*

With Mary the mother of Jesus was her sister Salome, wife of Zebedee and the mother of the apostles James and John (compare Matt 27:56 with Mark 15:40 and here). John does not name his mother here for the same reason that he does not name himself, out of modesty.

*Mary the wife of Clopas.*

This Mary, the wife of Clopas, was the mother of James the less and of Josés (compare Matt 27:56 with Mark 15:40). Nothing else is known for certainty about these men.

*and Mary Magdalene.*

This Mary was from the town of Magdala by the Sea of Galilee not far from Capernaum. Jesus had cast out seven demons from her (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). She had become a devoted follower of Jesus.

### **The care of Jesus for his mother Mary (19:26,27)**

*26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' 27 Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

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*When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by. Seeing his mother suffering must have grieved Jesus deeply. However, the beloved disciple John was there supporting her. He was the only apostle recorded as being present at the crucifixion.*

*he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son! (the second saying). Jesus has a word of comfort for his mother. John would look after her in future, in his place. Who better was there for this task than John, who was caring for her in this hour of her greatest trial? He would be able to care for all her needs, including her spiritual needs. No one else understood Jesus better, nor had been closer to Jesus than John.*

*Woman.* The term 'woman' (lady) was not disrespectful. This is how Jesus had addressed his mother at Cana, at the

beginning of his public ministry (2:4). Jesus had taught her then that her relationship to him must be as Lord and Saviour rather than that of mother. Jesus now reminds her of that fact, by addressing her as he had done then. Mary submitted then and she submits now. This humble submission to the will of God is the triumph of grace and faith in Mary (Luke 1:38).

to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. Jesus charged John with the responsibility of looking after Mary like a good son. John instantly agrees to the privilege given to him. From that hour he takes Mary into his household. For the remainder of her life, we can be sure that John fulfilled the charge so solemnly given to him.

### The final three hours of Jesus on the cross (19:28-30)

The three other Gospels record that from noon to three o'clock in the afternoon, a supernatural darkness covered the whole area (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). This symbolised the midnight darkness of the soul under the judgment of God for sin. During those three hours on the cross, Jesus suffered the full reality of hell in his soul on behalf of the redeemed. He, the sin-bearer, took upon himself the infinite guilt and punishment of their sin and redeemed (literally 'purchased') them.

The offer of this salvation is made to the whole world. It is in that sense that Jesus died for the whole world. The atonement is offered to all. However, it is effectual only for those who believe.

This darkness of soul experienced by Jesus is evidenced by his fourth saying on the cross, his loud cry of dereliction: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt 27:46; Ps 22:1). His Father was acting as Judge against sin. For Jesus, as sin-bearer, this meant that Jesus experienced the full wrath of God against sin. A mere human being could never bear the penalty for sin; only someone who is also truly God could do this.

This loud cry of dereliction (literally 'roaring', Ps 22:1) from Jesus came towards the end of the three hours of darkness (Matt 27:46). Until then Jesus had suffered the crushing horror of utter desolation of spirit in silence for nearly three hours. It will always be impossible for us, even to all eternity, to comprehend the depth of the suffering which Jesus experienced at that time.

'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain' is the anthem sung by all the angels and all the redeemed in heaven for ever and for ever (Rev 5:11-14). Amen!

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!' 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there;

and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished. Jesus came through the 'eternal death' into the light of victory. Communion was restored with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew that the work of atonement for sin was now accomplished.

said, 'I thirst!' Jesus uttered his fifth saying. The intensity of his sufferings had given to Jesus a burning and consuming thirst (see Luke 16:23,24). This thirst had also been prophesied (Ps 22:15; 69:21). Merciful hands were there to give him a sponge filled with a thirst-quenching drink of sour wine on a stick of hyssop. Now that his atoning work was ended, Jesus accepted the drink. Before, he had refused to drink it (Matt 27:34).

30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished!' And bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.

he said, 'It is finished!' the sixth saying. The work which his Father had given Jesus to do is finished. In accordance with the prophecy of Daniel 9:24, Jesus 'has finished the transgression, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness.'

And bowing his head, he gave up his spirit. Immediately after, with a loud cry of triumph, Jesus yields up his life in a voluntary act of self-will (John 10:17,18). He did so with his seventh and final saying 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5). After his death the centurion cries, 'Truly this man was the Son of God' (Mark 15:39).

After Jesus gave up his spirit there was an earthquake and 'the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom' (Matt 27:51,54). By this action, the final word is given by God. The veil of the temple separated the inmost shrine of the temple, the 'dwelling place of God', from all other parts of the temple. So this act of God carried with it the message that the way into the presence of God in heaven for sinners is now open as a result of the 'finished work' of Jesus.

Jesus. The atonement had been accepted, once and forever.

Heaven is now open for sinners, through personal repentance and faith in Jesus. The offer is made to everyone. ■

This act of God carried with it the message that the way into the presence of God in heaven for sinners is now open as a result of the 'finished work' of Jesus. The atonement had been accepted, once and forever.

Bob Davey is the pastor of Looe Christian Fellowship, having pastored FIEC churches in South London.



CRAWFORD GRIBBEN

**JOHN  
OWEN**

**(1616-1683)**

## Four Centuries of Influence

### Early years

John Owen, perhaps the greatest theologian of the English Puritan movement, was born some time in 1616 to a family living in the tiny village of Stadhampton in Oxfordshire. The family was not especially wealthy, and neither were they especially rigorous in their religious views, despite the fact that their father was a clergyman of the established church. Late in life, Owen described his father as a 'a Nonconformist all his days, and a painful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord' (Works, 13: 224), but it is not clear that his father was committed to any radical programme of reform within the English church. His father was not among those Puritans whose dissatisfaction with the Church of England drove them into exile in Holland or to the New World, for he remained

within the establishment, apparently neglecting to fulfil some aspects of his liturgical duties, as was common among the party of conforming Puritans whose hopes for further reformation had ended shortly after the accession of James I.

Owen's well-known description of his father may reflect the kindness of a dimmed memory, a filial piety that wanted to distinguish his father from those elements of the liturgical practice of the established church that Owen, throughout his life, found most objectionable. Therefore, rather than being the heir of a radical tradition, Owen grew up in a religious community that had worked hard for the reformation of the Church of England, and had failed. Owen grew up knowing the bitter reality of defeat.



Owen's sense of the marginal status of the religious community to which he belonged would have been confirmed during his university studies in Queen's College, Oxford, which he commenced at the age of 12. This was not an especially young age at which to begin university education in the early seventeenth century – and in fact the English universities were admitting a higher proportion of young men than in many other periods. But this expansion of university education came alongside the introduction of a number of controversial structural changes that made Owen's college days tumultuous. During the late 1620s and 1630s, Queen's College, with the rest of the university, passed through a religious revolution, as the Reformed theological consensus that had dominated theological discussion for several decades was replaced by a new theological system, which seemed to its critics to mimic Catholic styles of worship, and which questioned elemental components of English Protestant identity. Within Queen's, the debate provoked threats of violence, with one academic threatening to stab the provost who was driving forward the liturgical changes. The death threat was a sign of things to come, for England was about to enter a long civil war, in which religious ideas would be used to justify horrific levels of violence. Diaries from the period illustrate both the excitement of undergraduate life within the college, and the growing pressures for teaching fellows to find ways to shoe-horn their old religious principles into the new liturgical mould.

Some of the college community could

not do so. At the age of 21, nine years after his admission to Queen's College, Owen had graduated with his BA and MA degrees, and was likely a junior member of the teaching faculty. His years of hard study had earned him a place among the postgraduate students, and he may have been working towards his BD. But after years of preparation for an academic or clerical career, Owen felt he had to leave Oxford. He could not support the religious innovations that were being pushed through Queen's with the support of the provost and through the university with the support of the Vice-Chancellor. The new and fashionable Arminianism ran entirely counter to a number of Owen's convictions. Choosing conscience over career, Owen left the university.

It is not clear where or how Owen spent the next few years of his life. In the few surviving glimpses of his life during this period, Owen seems to be making erratic and unpredictable decisions. For, within a year of abandoning his academic career, he sought ordination as a priest at the hands of the Bishop of Oxford, one of the chief supporters of the Arminian innovations. He then found employment as a chaplain in the home of Sir Robert Dormer, a suspected Catholic whose riotous recreational activities suggested no sympathy for Puritan views. By 1642, Owen had accepted another position as a household chaplain, this time in the home of Sir John Lovelace. Throughout this period, Owen appears to have been suffering from depression. It is possible that his move to the Lovelace household occurred around the same time that his father and elder brother took up new pastoral charges in the vicinity – though

as a cause or consequence of these family movements we cannot tell. As so often in Owen's life, we are left to balance possibilities. But it is possible that members of the family, which appears to have been close-knit, were deliberately regrouping to support their brother in his discouragement and, possibly, fear.

For fear was in the air. In the summer of 1642, as Owen officiated as household chaplain to a young married couple whose cousin, Richard Lovelace, would become one of the most eminent apologists of the emerging party of Royalists, England drifted into its first Civil War. Dormer and Lovelace, who had employed Owen, both declared in favour of the king. Owen, who did not need to express any political preference, decided in favour of Parliament. Having abandoned the university, he now left the Lovelace household, and the path into pastoral work it represented, and travelled to London, without obvious prospects and almost entirely without friends. In the capital, one of the largest and most international cities in Europe, Owen found lodgings in Smithfield, a cheap and unpleasant place to live, close to the red-light district and to the place where so many of the Protestant martyrs had died one century before.

### Finding God's calling

It was in this unpromising situation that Owen found his purpose in life. As censorship collapsed, Owen began to write, developing a manuscript on the priesthood of Christ that he never

published. And, more importantly, Owen was converted. This event, which finally brought an end to Owen's depression, was entirely unexpected. Owen was sermon-gadding, attending a church service along with his cousin in the hope of listening to preaching by a famous divine. But the famous preacher could not attend. His replacement seemed much less

promising, and Owen's cousin wanted to leave the service for better prospects elsewhere. Owen did not feel well enough to do so. He stayed, and found the unknown preacher directly addressing his situation. Under this unknown ministry, and on an unknown date, Owen was born again.

His aspirations to be a writer were similarly renewed. For the first time, perhaps, Owen had come to understand how the doctrines that had been so fiercely debated during the previous decade could bring peace to a troubled soul. And so, with new resolve, he threw himself into another writing project, *A Display of Arminianism*, which he dedicated to a committee of MPs who oversaw the religious health of the nation. It was not an auspicious first publication, for Owen was still learning how to construct an argument, and how to argue a case with clarity, accuracy and discretion. It is not clear, as a number of recent scholars have noted, that his depiction of his theological antagonists was entirely fair, and Owen certainly erred in including a prominent Presbyterian member of the Westminster Assembly among his targets. Nevertheless, gaining the attention of

IT WAS IN THIS UNPROMISING SITUATION THAT OWEN FOUND HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE

his parliamentary patrons, Owen found the support he needed to enter parish ministry.

The committee of MPs appointed Owen to his first parish, in Fordham, Essex. Finally settling into parish ministry, he became frustrated by the spiritual apathy of his parishioners. Within a few years he had married a girl from the neighbouring village of Coggeshall and had started a family. But, in the later 1640s, as poor weather and a series of bad harvests created the conditions of famine, John and Mary buried several of their children. At Coggeshall, Owen was initially excited by the possibility of a new start, not least because the parish's previous minister was now a member of the Westminster Assembly. Large crowds came to hear him preach, with some suggestions that over 2,000 people attended his sermons. But this was not a sign of revival — his parishioners were legally compelled to attend worship. And, within a few years, he was again disappointed by the spiritual condition of his parish, and lamenting its disorder in print. This disappointment with the realities of parish ministry developed as Owen changed his views on church order. In his early parish ministry, he moved from supporting a rather unformed Presbyterianism to adopt the vision of church life then being promoted by Independents.

There may have been much less to this movement than some later historians

have suggested, for in the period before the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) the 'Presbyterian' label was widely applied to those Puritans who pushed for further reform within the Church of England without supporting any detailed

Owen's growing sense of the need to emphasise the autonomy of individual congregations involved much more than defining his ecclesiological concerns

manifesto for what might replace it. But Owen's growing sense of the need to emphasise the autonomy of individual congregations involved much more than defining his ecclesiological concerns.

Owen's neighbouring minister, Ralph Josselin, recorded in his diary the ways in which the Coggeshall church was changing. Owen installed an elder, John Sams, and had him preach without any ordination,

even as he downplayed the importance of his own ordination. Sams was examined by the Westminster Assembly, and supported for ordination, several years after he was recorded as being a teaching elder in Owen's congregation. In addition, Owen gathered believers together for weeknight Bible study meetings, in which many people participated, in a move that might have been seen to undermine the special status of the congregation's teacher. Owen also revised his views on the Lord's Supper, moving gradually to the position that the Eucharist should be celebrated on a weekly basis, by a gathered church rather than by members of a parish, retaining its centrality and the frequency of its observation while his neighbour, Ralph Josselin, gave up on the sacrament for a decade. These were notable departures from the norms of church life in the period – and in Owen's

case, as so often in Christian history thereafter, key indicators of an impulse to recover as accurately as possible the order of the New Testament churches.

For Owen was also revising his views of baptism, moving steadily away from the very high view of the efficiency of baptism that he outlined in his first publication to adopt in the 1650s a perspective on the sacrament that made sense of his growing sympathy for Baptists.

### Owen in the Commonwealth

Owen's new vision of church life was developed in startling contrast to the clerical, formal and liturgical preferences of his Presbyterian colleagues. Their Blasphemy Act (1648) criminalised adherence to a range of religious opinions, making any defence of believers' baptism, for example, a penal offence. The most effective opposition to this Presbyterian theocracy was located in the army, and Owen increasingly identified himself with its leading figures. In 1648 he witnessed the siege of Colchester, a large town five miles from Coggeshall. It was Owen's first direct experience of the Civil Wars and it must have been harrowing. Some of the worst war crimes of the period were committed during that long summer siege. But if Owen was disturbed by the crimes against civilians, and the horrific mutilation of animals, he did not refer to it in the sermons. He preached celebrating the achievements of the

HE WAS BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESHAPE THE INSTITUTION, SO AS TO PROTECT REFORMED THEOLOGY AND PROMOTE GODLINESS AMONG THE STAFF AND STUDENTS

Parliamentary soldiers and their leader, Sir Thomas Fairfax. These sermons brought him to the attention of the army. As the political mood darkened, and, in the winter of 1648-49, the king was put on trial and executed, Owen's

new patrons within the high military command identified him as the man to express their achievements in political preaching.

Owen was the preacher chosen to commemorate the English revolution. One day after the execution of Charles I, on the charge of treason, Owen addressed MPs with an oration that understood without celebrating the achievements of regicide. He, like his patrons, had something to gain from the new situation of England. Owen's new links with the army pulled him further from parish ministry and brought

him into contact with Oliver Cromwell.

Owen's links with this extraordinary and brilliant military leader were initially very close. He accompanied Cromwell on the invasion of Ireland in 1649, remaining in Dublin where for the first time he believed his ministry was being attended with conversions. His journey to Scotland in 1650 was more complicated, and he was drawn into the complex politics and internal divisions of the Kirk. He left the army, looking for new opportunities, and was awarded with positions of academic leadership in the university from which he had resigned less than 15 years before.



John Owen's return to Oxford was a moment of triumph. As Dean of Christ Church, and later Vice-Chancellor of the University, he was being given the opportunity to reshape the institution, so as to protect Reformed theology and promote godliness among the staff and students. He pursued these ends with diligence, and sometimes with a lack of scruple. It was a difficult and demanding transition. The move to Oxford had pushed him from the moral clarity of Civil War into the ambiguous and complex world of academic politics. There is some evidence that he struggled to know how best to negotiate his new environment. For all that these appointments represented the apex of his career; they also represented his greatest challenges.

Owen preached and wrote relentlessly throughout his years in Oxford. A number of the books he completed during the 1650s have become spiritual classics, including *Communion with God* and his work on sanctification. But he was also becoming increasingly critical of the government. It was obvious that the army, not the parliament, held the real political power. Cromwell's government was increasingly similar to that of the king it had replaced. Owen grew worried, but then over-reached himself. In 1654 he was elected as an MP for the first Protectorate Parliament. In his few months in the Commons, he was associated with radical republicans, men who were alarmed by the monarchical trappings of the Cromwell family. Within months, Owen was expelled from Parliament on the basis that he was a clergyman — a status he rejected. He

was, he insisted, a layman, and rejected the status conferred upon him by the Arminian bishop of Oxford one decade before.

Sent back to Oxford, perhaps with his tail between his legs, Owen became ever more critical of Cromwell and the direction being taken by his government. He condemned the frivolity of Cromwell's court and intervened on behalf of army republicans to stop Cromwell being crowned as king. By 1657 the breach with his old patron and friend was complete.

Owen did not see Cromwell as he gradually sickened and in September 1658 died. When Oliver was replaced by Richard, his son, who wished to continue the conservative trend, Owen moved immediately to gather a congregation of disaffected republicans, who, in a complex series of events, worked to undermine the new government before it had any chance of real success.

The army had brought down governments before. In fact, almost every parliament since the regicide had been ended by the army's intervention. But, this time, the officers gambled and lost. Their coup created chaos until Charles II returned.

### The church in a storm

The restoration of the monarchy in May 1660 ended the English revolution. Its leaders were tried, found guilty of treason and publicly butchered. Meanwhile, the ejection of Puritan ministers from the Church of England in August 1662 ended any hope that the godly could be accommodated within the established

church. Owen, who was in some personal danger, struggled to know how best to respond to the new circumstances. His activities in the early 1660s reveal his mental conflict. In January 1661, while he was conducting a conventicle, his house was raided and the militia carried away half a dozen cases of pistols. Throughout the same period, his books advocated a surprising range of positions. In *Animadversions on Fiat Lux* (1662) and its *Vindication* (1664), for example, Owen praised the new king as the greatest Protestant in Europe, defended his role as the head of the established church, and denied the need for confessions of faith. In other publications from this period, he defended Independent church order and called for congregations to strenuously defend confessional Reformed theology. All of these works were published anonymously, and some of them were published illegally. There was certainly need for caution. Owen passed by the impaled heads of many of his old friends every time he passed in and out of London. Who is to say he did not fear that he too could become a victim?

But the political situation began to settle. By the mid-1660s, Nonconformists gained courage to begin public preaching again, even in London. Owen kept his head down, kept writing, and found time in 1668 to pose for a portrait by one of the most fashionable and dissolute of the court painters. By the early 1670s, his situation had changed again. His small congregation, which comprised around 30 individuals, many of them prominent republicans with close



 John Owen grave

links to the party that had scuppered the English revolution, combined with a congregation of around 100 individuals, which had been led by the recently deceased Joseph Caryl. They began to meet in the premises belonging to the larger congregation.

His sermons were shorter, more focused and geared very directly to the pastoral needs of his listeners.

Owen's preaching changed to address his new situation. His sermons were shorter, more focused and geared very directly to the pastoral needs of his listeners. In many ways, these sermons, which are mostly collected in volume 9 of the *Banner of Truth* edition of his *Works*, represent some of the best of his work. He moved away from the extended topic and exegetical series that had featured in his earlier ministry to instead present different themes and passages each week. Perhaps many members of his new congregation had grown tired of the preaching of extended series of sermons – after all, Caryl's

series on Job had lasted 40 years. We get our clearest view of Owen's pastoral concerns in the materials that survive from this period of his ministry. Now in his mid-50s, Owen was surrounded by death. Mary, his wife, died in the later 1670s and their only surviving child died shortly later. He quickly remarried, but his friends remarked on his continuing depression. He had lost so much – a wife, each of his children, and, he seemed to be convinced, the work of a lifetime. Owen looked across the spectrum of English Dissent and persuaded himself that the churches were in ruins. When he died, in August 1683, Owen believed that the English Reformation was almost over and that the Puritan project had failed.

### Owen's legacy

Of course, events proved otherwise. The Glorious Revolution of 1689-90 secured the British Protestant constitution, but it did not secure the integrity of the British churches. Owen's congregation was not long to continue in his footsteps. Isaac Watts, his successor in the pastoral office, experimented with Trinitarian doctrine to such an extent that by 1720s the Unitarians believed he had come to support their cause.

But some evangelicals did continue to appreciate Owen's legacy. Surprisingly, perhaps, it was John Wesley who kept Owen's reputation alive when he

republished parts of Owen's writing in his *Christian Library* (1750). Throughout the eighteenth century, Scottish publishers kept his ecclesiastical works in print, while a much smaller number of English publishers occasionally reprinted his devotional and exegetical works.

In the nineteenth century, Owen was praised by the Exclusive Brethren leader William Kelly, even as he was abominated by liberal evangelicals within the Church of Scotland. In the early twentieth century, he found appreciative readers among A W Pink in the 1920s, Martyn Lloyd-Jones in the 1930s, and Jim Eliot, the future missionary martyr, in the early 1950s. And so, when the Banner of Truth republished *The Death of Death* (1959), the stage was already set for Owen's return.

Today, it is easier than ever before to read this greatest of Puritan theologians. Owen's books, in both original and modernised editions, are readily available. And he deserves to be read. Owen's work repays all the close attention it requires – for Owen was extraordinary. ■

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JOEL BEEKE

# JOHN OWEN

## His Writings, and Views on Assurance of Faith



Born four centuries ago, the great Puritan John Owen (1616–1683) has been called the 'prince of the English divines', 'the leading figure among the Congregationalist divines', 'a genius with learning second only to Calvin's', and 'indisputably the leading proponent of high Calvinism in England in the late seventeenth century'. In this brief article, I wish to provide a brief overview of his writings, and then focus on one neglected area of his teaching: his views on assurance of faith.

### Owen's Writings

John Owen wrote twenty-four volumes on biblical and devotional themes, including his sixteen-volume *Works*, his seven-volume *Exposition on Hebrews*, and the

single-volume *Biblical Theology*. All are still in print today. Some of his correspondence has also been collected and printed. Here is a brief summary of his corpus:

*The Works of John Owen*, 16 volumes (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 9,000 pages; 1996). The contents of these volumes, reprints of the 1850–55 Goold edition, include the following:

Doctrinal (volumes 1–5). Of particular value in this section are: *On the Person and Glory of Christ* (vol 1); *Communion with God* (vol 2); *Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (vol 3); *Justification by Faith* (vol 5). To master such works as these, Spurgeon wrote, 'is to be a profound theologian'.

Practical (volumes 6–9). Especially worthy here are *Mortification of Sin*, *Temptation*, *Exposition of Psalm 130* (vol 6); and *Spiritual-Mindedness* (vol 7). Volumes 8 and 9 are comprised of sermons. These volumes are suited for the average layperson and have immense practical benefit.

Controversial (volumes 10–16). Noteworthy are *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* and *Divine Justice* (vol 10); *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* (vol 11); *True Nature of a Gospel Church* and *The Divine Original of the Scriptures* (vol 16). Several volumes in this section are of great historical value (particularly those written against Arminianism and Socinianism) but tend to be tedious for the non-theologian.

The wide range of subjects treated by Owen, the insightfulness of his writing, the exhaustive nature of his doctrinal studies, the profundity of his theology, and the warmth of his devotion explain the high regard he has among those acquainted with his works. On occasions Owen may be prolix, but he is never dry. These volumes provide an invaluable resource for all who wish to discover and explore the rich legacy left by one of the greatest British theologians of all time. Helpful indices conclude the last volume.

Dozens of Owen's treatises have been published individually in the past half century, but we would advise serious readers of Puritan literature to forgo these and purchase the sixteen-volume set of Owen's works. For those who have difficulty reading Owen, we recommend R J K Law's abridged

simplifications of *Communion with God* (1991), *Apostasy from the Gospel* (1992), *The Glory of Christ* (1994), and *The Holy Spirit* (1998), all published by the Banner of Truth Trust. Unabridged paperbacks of the last two titles, with helpful introductions by Sinclair Ferguson, were published in 2004 by Christian Focus.

*An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 7 vols, 4,000 pages; 2005). This exposition of Hebrews is a definitive commentary on the Epistle. As Thomas Chalmers noted: 'A work of gigantic strength and size; he who hath mastered it is very little short, both in respect to the doctrinal and practical aspects of Christianity, of being an erudite and accomplished theologian.' Bogue and Bennett, in *History of Dissenters*, also highly commend the work, saying, 'If the theological student should part with his coat or his bed to procure the works of Howe, he that would not sell his shirt to procure those of John Owen, and especially his Exposition, of which every sentence is precious, shows too much regard to his body, and too little for his immortal mind.'

*Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 912 pages; 2009). This book was finally translated from Latin by Stephen Westcott in 1994. Biblical

Theology includes six books that trace biblical theology from Adam to Christ. It includes an appendix with Owen's *Defence of Scripture against Fanaticism*, affirming that the Bible is the perfect, authoritative, and complete Word of God. Though Owen considered this work his magnum opus, it has become one of his least-known works.

Owen plainly asserted the attainability of assurance.

Still, as J I Packer writes of this book: 'All the qualities we expect of Owen – the focus on God, the passion for Christ, the honouring of the Holy Spirit, the shattering depth of insight into human sinfulness and perversity, the concern for holiness, the radical view of regeneration, the vision of the church as a spiritual fellowship that worships, the distrust of philosophical schemes and styles for dealing with divine things, the celebration of God's wisdom in giving the Scriptures in the form in which we have them – all are seen here. The present treatise is vintage Owen, searching and spiritual, devotional and doxological, the product of a masterful mind and a humble heart.'

*The Correspondence of John Owen, 1616-1683* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke Press, 190 pages; 1970). Until this book was printed, very few of Owen's letters were known; assumedly, no more existed. Peter Toon here presents much of Owen's correspondence, including letters and responses to Oliver Cromwell. Though they are not useful for devotional use, those who study Owen will appreciate their historical value. The book also includes an essay on Owen's life and work.

### Owen on Assurance of Faith

Owen's views on assurance of faith have largely been neglected due in part to his never writing a separate treatise on this important subject. His most thorough exposition of assurance is in his Psalm CXXX. This can best be understood as an augmentation of the *Westminster Confession's* teachings on assurance, while remaining within its framework.

Like the Westminster Confession, Owen regarded assurance as normative though not necessarily common.

### The Attainability of Assurance

Owen plainly asserted the attainability of assurance. He wrote: 'There may be a gracious persuasion and assurance of faith in a man concerning his own particular interest in forgiveness. A man may, many do, believe it for themselves, so as not only to have the benefit of it but the comfort also.'

The attainability of assurance must be understood in relationship to faith, however. Owen unreservedly supported an organic relationship between faith and assurance but no confusion between the two. He believed faith included persuasion of the availability of divine forgiveness, but said that did not necessarily include the personal application

of forgiveness—which alone gives rise to full assurance. He wrote, 'There is or may be a saving persuasion or discovery of forgiveness in God, where there is no assurance of any particular interest therein.'

Of the element of trust in faith that cleaves to God, Owen wrote: 'This a soul cannot do, without a discovery of forgiveness in God; but this a soul may do, without a special assurance of his own interest therein.' For Owen, personal knowledge of inclusion in God's grace usually happens sometime after initial belief, according to God's sovereign timing.

### Assurance Normative but not Common

Like the *Westminster Confession*, Owen regarded assurance as normative though not necessarily common. That was consistent with the Confession's teaching



that there are degrees and various kinds of assurance. All true believers possess some assurance, but few can claim the blessing of 'full assurance'. Owen wrote, 'This discovery of forgiveness in God is great, holy, and mysterious, and which very few on gospel grounds do attain unto... Even one experimental embracement of it (i.e. the full assurance of personal interest in divine forgiveness), even at the hour of death, doth well deserve the waiting and obedience of the whole course of a man's life.'

Believers who gain full assurance of forgiveness by God don't find it quickly or easily. Those who don't understand that can substitute a notion of forgiveness in God for personal forgiveness from God.

Owen also believed that believers with full assurance were never safe from attacks on their faith. Still, even when a believer is spiritually 'cast down', assurance is not altogether lost (Psalm 42); rather, assurance may continue even under a deep sense of indwelling sin and infirmity. Owen wrote: 'A man's assurance may be as good, as true, when he lies on the earth with a sense of sin, as when he is carried up to the third heaven with a sense of love and foretaste of glory.'

Here Owen not only confirmed but went beyond section 18.4 of the *Westminster Confession*. For Owen, conviction of sin and assurance of salvation were not antagonistic. Rather, both should be sought, and both are given and retained by God's grace. Though full assurance is difficult to obtain, true believers must strive for it. As Owen wrote: 'It is the duty of every believer to labour after an assurance of a personal interest in forgiveness, and to be diligent

in the cherishing and preservation of it when it is attained.... It is no small evil in believers not to be pressing after perfection in believing and obedience.'

The Christian need not despair if he comes short of reaching such assurance, for God may have wise reasons for withholding it from him. Despite God's wisdom and sovereignty, however, lack of assurance is ordinarily due to the believer's shortcomings. As Owen wrote: 'In ordinary dispensations of God towards us, and dealings with us, it is mostly our own negligence and sloth that we come short of this assurance.... Considering what promises are made unto us, what encouragements are given us, what love and tenderness there is in God to receive us, I cannot but conclude that ordinarily the cause of our coming short of this assurance is where I have fixed it.'

Owen went on to show how lack of assurance is primarily the believer's fault by citing saints of Scripture, who possessed full assurance. He wrote: 'Generally, all the saints mentioned in Scripture had this [full] assurance, unless it were in the case of depths, distresses, and desertions, such as that in this psalm (i.e. Psalm 130). David expresseth his confidence of the love and favour of God unto his own soul hundreds of times; Paul doth the same for himself: Gal. ii., 20, "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me."'

Although Owen did not specifically say so, those examples helped him keep a balance between the supposed normality of full assurance and the lack of assurance he saw in most of the believers of his day. Hence, Owen believed that many believers

were living below their privileges, not sufficiently relishing the comfort of full assurance, either out of ignorance or because of sin. In either case, the contemporary church was backsliding compared to scriptural saints.

Finally, Owen tried to lessen the gap between the normative assurance of the biblical saints and the predominant lack of assurance in his generation. He did that

by distinguishing between full assurance applied on a regular basis for daily living and full assurance received for fleeting moments particularly in times of heavy trial. Though Christians of his day did not commonly experience full assurance on a daily basis as scriptural saints did, they did receive full assurance in times of heavy trial.

Owen's approach to assurance may be summarised in the following chart:

NORMATIVITY OF ASSURANCE

DEGREES OF ASSURANCE	BIBLICAL SAINTS	OWEN'S CONTEMPORARIES
1. Is there a regular degree of assurance for believers who trust in God's forgiveness of sinners?	Yes, for this degree of assurance is part of faith itself.	Same as for biblical saints.
2. Is there a full degree of assurance for believers that comes for brief moments, particularly in times of trial, i.e., that God's forgiveness is also personally for them.	Yes, generally speaking.	Yes, generally speaking, though such experiences may be rare and fleeting, and in some lacking altogether.
3. Is there a full degree of assurance for believers that comes in a more regular, abiding, strengthening manner, and which reaps a comfortable sense of daily favor except in uncommon periods of divine desertion?	Yes, generally speaking, though such believers remained subject to many assaults and much variation with regards to their full assurance.	Usually not, for few come up to this gospel assurance. Those who experience this have found it difficult to retain; they remain subject to assaults and variations on full assurance.

Owen's approach to full assurance was in harmony with that of the *Westminster Confession*, though he moved beyond it by distinguishing full assurance in

an abiding sense from a more fleeting sense; and by distinguishing the state of adherence from the state of assurance.

## How Assurance is Obtained

Owen's theology on how assurance is obtained is very much like that of the *Westminster Confession*, 18.2, which says assurance is obtained through the promises of salvation in Jesus Christ, as well as through inward evidences of saving grace and the testimony of the Spirit of adoption. Specifically, Owen taught the following:

(1) The primary ground of assurance is the promises of God, specifically the satisfying blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, embraced by faith. Owen wrote: 'The soul, by a direct act of faith, believes its own forgiveness, without making inferences or gathering conclusions; and may do so upon the proposition of it to be believed in the promise.'

(2) The primary ground of assurance leads the believer to the secondary ground, for he who trusts in the objective promises of God in Jesus Christ will yearn to have those promises to be subjectively 'testified unto his conscience in a word of promise mixed by faith'. According to Owen, that testimony is one of two secondary grounds of assurance and is based on inward evidences of saving grace. Here Owen's views varied slightly from the *Westminster Confession*, which left open the possibility that the secondary grounds of assurance could be treated as a single unity. Along with his recognition of the immediate witness of the Spirit, Owen validated the practical syllogism as God's ordinary way of bestowing assurance. He wrote, 'A due spiritual consideration of the causes and

effects of regeneration is the ordinary way and means whereby the souls of believers come to be satisfied concerning that work of God in them and upon them.'

Owen then added three warnings about the practical syllogism. He said, first, direct

acts of faith do not excuse the individual from seeking the certainty of the Spirit's work. Second, Owen emphasised that the Holy Spirit sheds light upon his own work in the soul by the Word, thereby giving the believer liberty to embrace the 'evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made' (*Westminster Confession*, 18.2). Third, Owen insisted that this form of assurance may be consciously absent from the believer, regardless of whether the Spirit's graces are presently active within him.

(3) In advocating an immediate witness of the Spirit, Owen prevented this experience from becoming too mystical in the following ways. First, he said the Holy Spirit applies his immediate witness through the Word, not beyond the Word. Thus this witness, which is the direct, miraculous, and powerful application of the Word in God's sovereign time and way, is both Spirit-applied and Word-centred.

Second, Owen said the immediate witness wasn't always separated from the practical syllogism; consequently, they often supported each other. Owen illustrated that in his dialogue with a 'poor soul that now walks comfortably under the light of God's countenance'.

Third, Owen said that the immediate testimony of the Spirit should not be expected or depended upon because of its extraordinary role as a sovereign gift. Moreover, because the Spirit's immediate testimony is sovereign, no one can say exactly how full assurance should be experienced. Owen thus wrote: 'If you are doubtful concerning your state and condition, do not expect an extraordinary determination of it by an immediate testimony of the Spirit of God. I do grant that God doth sometimes, by this means, bring in peace and satisfaction unto the soul. He gives his own Spirit immediately "to bear witness with ours that we are the children of God", both upon the account of regeneration and adoption. He doth so; but, as far as we can observe, in a way of sovereignty, when and to whom he pleaseth.

No one man's experience is a rule unto others, and an undue apprehension of it is a matter of great danger. Yet it is certain that humble souls in extraordinary cases may have recourse unto it with benefit and relief thereby. This, then, you may desire, you may pray for, but not with such a frame of spirit as to refuse that other satisfaction which in the ways of truth and peace you may find. This is the putting of the hand into the side of Christ: but 'blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'.

## Retaining, Renewing, and Improving Assurance

Finally, in Psalm CXXX, Owen showed how a believer may retain, renew, and improve personal assurance of grace. He said that can be done through three activities of faith: 'recalling' grace, 'waiting on' grace, and fruitful obedience.

The Christian must first seek grace to recall the Spirit's past, assuring work in order to improve upon his present degree of assurance. Owen indicated that he knew the typical believer seeks such grace far too seldom. Recalling grace may also reveal defects in the believer that thwart assurance.

Next, the Christian must wait for grace in order to renew and improve assurance. As Owen wrote: 'Whatever your condition be, and your apprehension of it, yet continue waiting for a better issue, and give not over through weariness or impatience.' Finally, while recalling and waiting for grace, the Christian must strive for obedience. Indeed, faith and obedience are ultimately inseparable. Said Owen, 'The more faith that is true and of the right kind, the more obedience; for all our obedience is the obedience of faith.'

According to Owen, such obedience manifests itself in 'the choicest actings of our souls towards God, —as love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, peace, joy, and consolation in ourselves, readiness to do or suffer, cheerfulness in so doing. If they grow not from this root, yet their flourishing wholly depends upon it; so that surely it is the duty of every believer to break through all difficulties in pressing after this particular assurance.' In short, the way to retain and improve assurance is through obedience, which is also the fruit of assurance. ■

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THE PRIMARY GROUND OF ASSURANCE IS THE PROMISES OF GOD, SPECIFICALLY THE SATISFYING BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST, EMBRACED BY FAITH.

# John Owen's Trinitarian Legacy

## A 400th Anniversary Appreciation

How should we live life to God's glory? Scripture commands us to do so (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). We may know that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever (*Westminster Shorter Catechism* 1), but how do we do so when we spend much of our time changing nappies, going to school, balancing work and classes, maintaining a house, or going to work on Monday mornings? In order to serve Christ faithfully, we must learn to do the right things, at the right times, and in the right way. God's Word is the lamp for our feet and the light for our path that alone teaches us how to do so (Ps 119:105). Among other things, this means that why we do what we do is just as important as what we do with our lives.

This is where a long-dead Puritan like John Owen can help us better live the Christian life. While today Christian best-sellers often promote dieting gimmicks or how to live your 'best life now', Owen's primary theological legacy to the church is his model for Trinitarian theology and piety. The advantage of his perspective is that it places communion with the Father, through

the Son, by the Spirit at the heart of Christian theology and life for all believers, and not for pastors only. I will illustrate this theme by showing that the fact that Owen would have a legacy was not immediately obvious. Then I will trace his Trinitarian themes from the beginning to the end of the Christian life from the knowledge of God, through God's worship, through killing indwelling sin, to looking forward to seeing Christ in glory. I will do this primarily by providing a few key statements from his writings, summarising what I have learned from him on each theme, and illustrating each point with Scripture. My goal is to illustrate how Owen, as mediated by McGraw, gives us a helpful model for living life to God's glory.

### Owen's legacy was not obvious during his lifetime

What legacy do you hope to leave to the next generation? Will your great-grandchildren even remember your name? Many remember Owen today, but it should encourage us to realise that it was not obvious in his lifetime that he would be remembered at all. He is hard to find

as a person in light of historical records. We do not have his journals and he rarely wrote about himself. Most of what survives from him is purely theological, stemming from his numerous writings, which some believers continue to study. Since few people in history are remembered for generations to come, his life provides a good illustration that we should do all things in Christ's name, leaving the results of our work to our Lord and Saviour. For this reason, I will sketch Owen's life in light of his personal and pastoral disappointments.

Owen was born in a Puritan home from Welsh descent in 1616. He went to study at Oxford university, only to finish his Bachelor's and Master's degrees before completing only one year of his seven-year Bachelor of Divinity degree in preparation for ministry. He left the University as a discouraged young man due to the persecution of Puritan-minded students by Archbishop William Laud. His future did not look promising. Though he is remembered as an author, his books did not sell well from 1643-1649, including his famous *Death of Death* in the Death of Christ. His publisher tried to dump his copies in bulk and only pressed further sales when Owen preached after the death of the king before Parliament. This reminds us that the Lord controls our circumstances, successes, and failures, directing them all to his glory and our good.

Owen preached to 2000 people in his first pastorate and to about 30 for a large part of his last one. His salary was three years in arrears in the mid-1650's and Oliver Cromwell's government finally gave him land in Ireland in lieu of his salary, which land he could not sell.<sup>1</sup>

Owen was second choice (or third?) to become Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, behind Edward Reynolds and Joseph Caryl. He had ten children, only one of which reached adulthood, and his first wife died in the middle of his career. He taught some students who neither adopted nor appreciated his instruction, such as the philosopher John Locke and the Quaker William Penn.<sup>2</sup>

Owen's books were read more widely after his death than during his lifetime. While the fact that he would have a legacy at all was not obvious, his primary contribution to the church, in this writer's opinion, consisted in his Trinitarian theology. This grew out of a continental theological heritage, Puritan piety, and anti-Socinian writings, which we will see below. The lesson from Owen's life is that you should commit your labours to the Lord and not judge your usefulness by outward appearances. If we labour to the glory of God in Christ through the Spirit, then this will be our most important legacy. Even if few appreciate it, what we do in Christ's name to the glory of the Father will last in

We may know that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever (*Westminster Shorter Catechism* 1), but how do we do so when we spend much of our time changing nappies, going to school, balancing work and classes, maintaining a house, or going to work on Monday mornings?

<sup>1</sup> Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Ohio University Press, 2016), 212. <sup>2</sup> Ibid



God's sight (Col. 3:17). Anything beyond this is icing on the cake.

### Owen's legacy lies in his devotional Trinitarian theology

One way to illustrate the connection between Owen's Trinitarian theology and his devotion to God is to take an excerpt from his large book against the Socinians. The Socinians denied the doctrine of the Trinity, Christ's substitutionary atonement, and most other doctrines that were near and dear to Protestants. In his preface to his work in which he refuted them, he wrote, 'What am I the better if I can dispute that Christ is God, but have no sense or sweetness in my heart from hence that he is a God in covenant with my soul? What will it avail me to evince, by testimonies and arguments, that he has made satisfaction for sin if, through my unbelief, the wrath of God abides on me and I have no experience of my own being made the righteousness of God in him – if I find not, in my standing before God, the excellency of having my sins imputed to him and his righteousness imputed to me? Will it be any advantage to me, in the issue, to profess and dispute that God works the conversion of a sinner by the irresistible grace of his Spirit if I was never acquainted experimentally with the deadness and utter impotency to do good, that opposition to the law of God that is in my own soul by nature, with the efficacy of the exceeding greatness of the power of God in quickening, enlightening, and bringing forth the fruits of obedience in me? It is

the power of truth in the heart alone that will make us cleave to it indeed in an hour of temptation. Let us, then, not think that we are any better for our conviction of the truths of the great doctrines of the gospel, for which we contend with those men, unless we find the power of the truths abiding in our own hearts and have a continual experience of their necessity and excellency in our standing before God and our communion with him.'<sup>3</sup>

He was saying in effect that it is not good enough to defend biblical teaching regarding the person and work of Christ and the Trinity. We must love the Triune God and walk in fellowship with him. Such emphases help keep our theology to be God-centred, which leads to God-centred lives in Christ.

This relates to how Owen defined theology. He believed that true theology is living to God, through Christ, by the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> This makes our theology begin with the Triune God revealing himself to us so that we might know him. This related to his teaching on communion with God.<sup>5</sup> He taught that Christ is the bond of union between believers and the Father by the Spirit. One of his favourite passages used to illustrate this point was Ephesians 2:18: 'Through him, we come to the Father, by one Spirit.' This teaching leads us to depend on the Father who planned our salvation, the Son who purchased it, and the Spirit who applies it as we live the Christian life (Eph 1:3-14).

The practical fruits of this teaching are great. To illustrate, a friend of mine, who was introduced to Owen's views of communion with God, particularly communion with Christ, related his reticence to take out the trash for his wife one day. He decided to take out the trash for his wife because of his meditations on Christ's self-denial for him. The Father's gift of his Son, Christ's gift of himself, and the Father and the Son's gift of the Spirit made him a better husband. We should think of theology and Christian living in terms of knowing God in Christ by the Spirit and not simply knowing about God (1 Cor 2:1-5, 9-12).

### Owen teaches us to worship God as Triune

One way that he does this is by reminding us of the glory of worship under the New Testament versus worship under the Old. In a sermon against Roman Catholicism, he wrote:

'It belongs, therefore, to our present design to give a brief account of the glory of the worship of God, and wherein it excels all other ways of divine worship that ever were in the world, even that under the Old Testament, which was of divine institution, wherein all things were ordered for beauty and glory. The express object of it is God, not as absolutely considered, but as existing in three persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the principal glory of Christian religion and its worship ...

THIS TEACHING LEADS US TO DEPEND ON THE FATHER WHO PLANNED OUR SALVATION, THE SON WHO PURCHASED IT, AND THE SPIRIT WHO APPLIES IT AS WE LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

This is the foundation of all the glory of evangelical worship. The object of it, in the faith of the worshipper, is the holy Trinity, and it consists in an ascription of divine glory to each person, in the same individual nature, by the same act of mind ... Its glory consists in that constant respect it has to each divine person, as to their peculiar work and moving for the salvation of the church.<sup>6</sup>

This is the highest expression of a God-centred theology. While Christians do many things other than public worship, they do nothing better than public worship. This is true by coming

to the Father as the chief privilege of the gospel and source of our comforts (1 Peter 1:17). By resting on the 'personal grace' of Christ, which relates to the glory of his person as the God-man. By trusting in the 'purchased grace' of Christ, by which he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor 5:21). By seeking the Spirit's presence to make our worship a taste of heaven on earth as the down payment of our purchased possession (Eph 1:14).

What are you looking for in public worship? Are you seeking to know God better or to feel better about yourself? Knowing God is knowing the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. God's Tri-unity should enrich our experience in worship by building on how God reveals himself in the gospel. This also helps to secure the gospel in the church by thinking of the gospel in terms of the work

<sup>3</sup> John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae, The Works of John Owen*, D.D., ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850), 12:52.

<sup>4</sup> This material is summarised from Ryan M McGraw, 'John Owen on the Study of Theology', *The Confessional Presbyterian* 6 (2010): 180–95.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, *Works*, Vol.2.

<sup>6</sup> Owen, 'The Chamber of Imagery of the Church of Rome Laid Open', *Works*, 8:556–557.

of divine persons, especially of Christ, instead of merely a list of benefits that we receive from God. Worshipping the Triune God on the Lord's Day enables us better to live to the Triune God from Monday through Saturday.

### Owen teaches us to kill sin in communion with the Triune God

Many people have heard of Owen's book, *The Mortification of Sin*. This originated as a series of sermons preached to teenage students at Oxford in the 1650s. Owen based this work on Romans 8:11-13, which says, 'But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.' Most people who read this book are looking for a list of things to do in order to gain victory over particular sins in their lives. What most overlook is that Owen argues that mortification does not really begin until we learn to exercise faith in Christ to kill our indwelling sin.<sup>7</sup> Keeping this point in view prevents moralism in the Christian life and it promotes success in serving God. As usual the Trinity grounded his instructions in the gospel.

Owen reminds readers that mortification is possible only through the Spirit at work

What are you looking for in public worship? Are you seeking to know God better or to feel better about yourself?

within us. By trusting in the Spirit, he states famously, 'Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.'<sup>8</sup> Mortification is possible only through union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5-14). While chapters 7-14 of the book provide nine rules for putting sin to death, Owen reminds us that mortification comes primarily through exercising faith in Christ by the Spirit's power.<sup>9</sup>

This should make us do some serious soul-searching. Do you treat the gospel as a 12-step programme or as living by the Spirit? How do you stop mistreating your wife or neglecting your children because you love Christ? Does your desire to honour the Father outstrip your love for sin? Start meditating on the presence and glory of the Triune God and the magnitude of Christ's love and suffering in order to make the steps you take to kill sin more effective. We need more meditation on the presence and glory of God in our lives in order to see greater changes in every area of life.

### Owen teaches us to anticipate communion with the Triune God in glory

This theme takes us to what older authors referred to as the beatific vision. The sight of God in glory is both blessed and transformative. By seeing Christ, we ultimately become like Christ, which affects what kind of lives we should want to live now (1 John 3:1-2). Desiring to know Christ better is what drove Paul to press

onward and upward in his life (Phil 3:12-16). Some have noted that Owen's version of the beatific vision stands out from that of some other authors because he insisted that we will see God primarily through the incarnate Christ for ever.<sup>10</sup>

His clearest treatment of this subject comes at the end of his book on *The Glory of Christ*, which is found in volume one of his Works. If readers want a suggestion as to where to start reading Owen, then this book is one of the best choices. He wrote it to help his congregation meditate on Christ's glory better. I will not explore this book here, but I note simply that a Christ-focused beatific vision keeps God as the goal of our theology. Christ mediates the knowledge of God in heaven as well as on earth (2 Cor 3:17-18; 4:6). The Spirit enables us to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in this life to some degree. Eternal life consists in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). Believers enjoy this life now in part, but in heaven they will experience it in its fullness.

Owen's theology begins with a Trinitarian knowledge of God. It ends with knowing the Father, through his Son, by his Spirit through seeing Christ as he is. This is the goal of Christian faith and life and it should give us focus in everything that we do. This brings us back to the beginning of this essay. We must learn what God would have us do with our lives by studying Scripture prayerfully. The Spirit teaches us how to do it through faith in Christ. We must engage in our labours, child-rearing, homemaking, education, and everything else that we do in a godly way that honours our heavenly

Father. Anything less will not only be forgotten, but it has no value. The end of the entire matter is that we must fear God and keep his commands, for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl 12:13). We can do so only by loving the Father who loved us and gave his Son for us that we might be built together into a temple of God by the Spirit.

### Conclusion

Why has the Trinity become irrelevant to the faith and life of so many Christians? Is it because, to some extent, God has become irrelevant to our Christianity? Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. We must do all things to God's glory (1 Cor 10:31) and we must do so by doing all things thankfully in Christ's name to the Father's glory (Col 3:17). We must worship the God who is spirit in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). While Owen's legacy was not apparent during his lifetime, he continues to help believers through his writings to bring their knowledge of the glory of this God and of his saving power to greater heights and in practical expressions. We need the Trinity to help us change diapers, go to class, do our maths, and balance our work and play to the glory of God. The great value of Owen's teaching is that it helps us not simply to depend on God generally and vaguely, but to depend on each divine person particularly. This is precisely the kind of God-centred revolutionary truth that our churches need so desperately today. ■

*Ryan M McGraw is Professor of Systematic Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He has written several books, including two on John Owen. He is married to Krista and they have four children.*

<sup>7</sup> Owen, *The Mortification of Sin in Believers*, Works, 6:79.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, Works, 6:9. <sup>9</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, Works, 6:78.

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne McDonald, 'Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the 'Reforming' of the Beatific Vision', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 141–58.



MICHAEL A G HAYKIN

# JOHN OWEN

## PURITAN ADVOCATE FOR FIGHTING SIN

In the providence of God the last few decades have witnessed a massive resurgence of interest in the Puritans, and central in this resurgence have been the works of John Owen (1616–1683), who was described by some of his contemporaries as the ‘Calvin of England’. Indeed, Owen is to be placed alongside such theological giants as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards as one of the great biblical mentors when it comes to theology and evangelical spirituality.

Born in 1616, Owen grew up in a godly, Puritan household. In the 1630s he went to study at Oxford, first for his BA and then for his MA. It was a tumultuous time for any who adhered to the Puritan cause, as Puritan leaders were becoming more vocal in their criticism of the unbiblical patterns of theological thought and worship of their mother church, the Church of England. The response to this criticism on the part of the Anglican leadership was to employ the power of the state to try to silence dissenting voices and bring about uniformity of belief. The ultimate result of this clash of perspectives was the English Civil Wars which lasted from 1642 to 1651.

Owen’s Puritan convictions naturally led him to sympathise with those fighting against the monarch, Charles I, who was a staunch defender of the state church. The initial victors in these struggles were the Puritans, who ruled much of Great Britain during the 1650s.

During this time of political turmoil Owen himself had been offered the pastorate in the village of Fordham, five miles or so from Colchester in Essex in 1643. Owen was here until 1646 when he became the minister of the church at Coggeshall, some five miles away. Here, as many as two thousand people would crowd into the church each Lord’s Day to hear Owen preach, a clear indication of his ability to preach. Owen’s gifts as a preacher and theologian were recognised later in the 1640s by none other than Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), a rising star in the world of Puritan politics, who eventually appointed Owen as the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. It was during this decade of Puritan ascendancy that Owen wrote two of his spiritual classics: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), and *Of Temptation* (1658), both of which were based on sermon

material preached during the 1650s and both of which today can be found in volume 6 of Owen’s collected works.

Though our technological and historical circumstances are very different from those of the Puritan era, the hearts of men and women have not changed. Indwelling sin, now as then, is an ever-present reality, as Owen details in these works. In fact, Owen argues that sin lies at the heart of even believers’ lives, and, if not resisted by prayer and meditation, will slowly but surely eat away zeal for and delight in the things of God.

*Of Temptation*, the second of these works, is essentially an exposition of Matthew 26:41 (‘Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation’). Owen enumerates four seasons in which believers must exercise special care that temptation not lead them away into sin: times of outward prosperity, times of spiritual coldness and formality, times when one has enjoyed rich fellowship with God, and times of self-confidence, as in Peter’s affirmation to Christ, ‘I will not deny thee’ (Matthew 26:35). The remedy that Owen emphasises is prayer. Typical of Puritan pithiness is his remark in this regard: ‘If we do not abide in prayer, we shall abide in cursed temptations.’

The first work, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, is in some ways Owen’s richest discussion of the mortification of sin. This treatise was based on a series of sermons on Romans 8:13 (‘If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live’).

For Owen this text made it abundantly clear that the believer has a constant duty to engage in the putting to death of the sin that still indwells his mortal frame. But equally important for Owen was the fact that this verse revealed that such a duty is only possible in the strength that the Holy Spirit supplies, for he alone is ‘sufficient

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for this work’. In essence, the Holy Spirit employs all of our human powers in the fight against sin. In sanctifying us, Owen insists, the Spirit works ‘in us and with us, not against us or without us’. Owen would rightly regard those today who talk about ‘letting go and letting God’ take care of the believer’s sins as unbiblical. Yet, he is very much aware that sanctification is also a gift. This duty, he rightly emphasises, is only accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Not without reason does

Owen then lovingly describe the Spirit as ‘the great beautifier of souls’.

In a day when significant sectors of evangelicalism are characterised by spiritual superficiality and torpor, and godliness is not normally a major topic of interest, these books are like a draught of water in a dry and thirsty land. They remind us of the great spiritual heritage that we possess as Reformed Evangelicals. Even more significantly, they challenge us to recover the biblical priority of a godly life.

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# 'THE EPISTLE TO THE READER'

## In Joseph Caryl, The Nature and Principles of Love, as the End of the Commandment (London, 1673)

Transcribed and introduced by Josh Monroe

The student of history will occasionally stumble upon something that is as surprising as it is delightful. Such is the case with this work of John Owen, which is one of nearly thirty extant prefaces that Owen wrote for the works of other men and which have never been reprinted since the seventeenth century. The work to which this preface is affixed is a posthumous publication of a few sermons by Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), who was himself quite well known and somewhat of a paradox. Caryl left a full thirty-four volumes of his sermons and he was the second most requested preacher to the House of Commons during his lifetime. Yet in the 1640s he was identified as a moderate Independent who preached in favour of treating a tender conscience with liberality and who, though opposing presbyterial ordination, served as a licenser of religious works and as one of the triers of elders. He also enjoyed several other appointments, including the rectory of St. Magnus the Martyr, London, service to King Charles at

Holmby House in 1647, and service as a chaplain to the commissioners of Scotland in 1648 and 1651. He even refused the deanship of Christ Church, Oxford in 1651, just before the position was offered to and taken by our author, John Owen.

Most of Owen's prefaces are exactly what one would expect: thoughtful commendations, usually brief, of both the work and its author. Such would be expected in this preface, especially as it was a posthumous publication of Joseph Caryl's final sermons. Surprisingly, Owen's commendation in this case is almost perfunctory. The remaining paragraphs serve notice not to those interested in Joseph Caryl, but to those who had been publishing works in Owen's name that Owen had not written. This self-vindication comprises two thirds of the preface. Therein lay the surprise and delight of this work; while expecting a kind and tidy eulogy (which is present) we find attached to that eulogy Owen's own indignation. We glimpse

not only the famous theologian working to safeguard his name, but also a more sordid side of the 17th-century publishing business.

Note: instances of archaic 17th-century spelling have been modernised. Paragraph divisions have been introduced to make Owen's text easier to read.

### Christian Reader

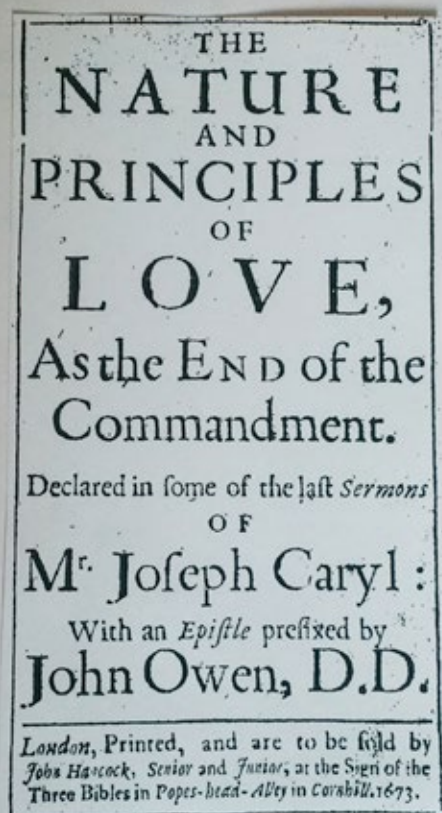
These sermons were preached by the reverend author of them a little while before his entrance into rest. I cannot learn that the occasions of them were extraordinary or that he had any design in them beyond that which accompanied the ordinary course of his ministry; much less a purpose to publish them, or conceiving them either more useful or more needful, or more laboured than the rest of his constant and frequent exercises in the same kind. Neither did he leave any such copy of them as might be helpful towards such an end. But they were taken from his mouth by the diligence of a dexterous hand, who at first designed nothing but his own use and edification by them; until observing how soon after the preaching of them, God was pleased to call him off from his painful labour in his vineyard, and so to cut short all expectations of farther administrations of truth and grace, by the trust and dispensation committed unto him; he resolved to make them public, for the good and benefits of others. And as herein he followed his own inclination and judgment; so if anything be found in these discourses as to phrase of speech, or manner of expression, not answering that accuracy, which this author was known to have used in all his writings published by himself; he alone must bear the blame

of it, from them who think such defects blameworthy. These things I could not but acquaint the reader withal, that he may look for no more in these sermons, but what he might have found in the constant ministry of the reverend author.

But yet I must say, upon their perusal, that take them under the circumstances mentioned, they give no ill or disadvantageous account of the ordinary labours and endeavours of this eminent minister of the gospel. Thus did Mr. Caryl use to preach, sometimes twice, sometimes thrice in the week, always showing himself a workman that needed not to be ashamed. And if I mistake not whoever shall consider these sermons with sobriety, candour and judgment, as part of his constant labours, will readily acknowledge, what rich and excellent talents he was entrusted with, and how the great reputation which his ministry had for so many years in the church of God, was no way undeserved.

For my accession to this work in a prefatory discourse, it arose merely from the importunity of the publisher and bookseller, as they both well know, and will acknowledge; wherein I see nothing myself of use or advantage, but only that I may render satisfaction to the reader, that he is not imposed upon by any spurious offspring fathered on so great and worthy a name. Somewhat also I was inclined unto a compliance with their desires, that I might make use of this advantage a little to declare how I have been treated by others in things of this nature.

Not long since came forth some sermons of a worthy person now also at rest with God, with an Epistle prefixed unto there,



📷 Front page

whereunto some letters of my name were subscribed. This occasioned a person at that time (for I hope he is since grown wiser) designing a reputation in buffoonery, to publish a reviling letter to me, or against me about that Epistle, which I wrote no more than he did himself; nor do believe had known to this day, either of Book or Epistle, had I not heard of it from him, and some other likeminded with him. But he seemed to have had a design, towards whole accomplishments, that practice was judged necessary. Lately also, the importunate solicitations of a bookseller prevailed with me to write a short Epistle

to an English Concordance which he had newly published; and no sooner had I done it, but in the Catalogue of Books printed the last term the Concordance itself is represented as completed, finished, and published by me, who never added nor altered one word or syllable to it, nor in it.

And having now thus far diverted from the present occasion, I shall crave leave of the reader, to proceed a little further in an account of one or two other disingenuities of the like kind, taken out from a numberless heap of impudent untruths and calumnies. Among those

many false and fierce accusations which one of late hath stuffed his scandalous writings withal, there is none which seems more accommodated to his purpose, than my composing or subscribing a paper published about the year 1658 containing the proposals and desires of the subscribers with respect to public affairs. This paper the man lighting on, supposing he had obtained a mighty advantage by finding the letters of my name, or my name itself set unto it, he rageth, and challengeth, and triumpheth in somewhat a peculiar manner, though that be difficult for him to do. Yet all this while I have just reason to believe, that he knew the paper was none of mine, that indeed I had no concernment in it; for as the things contained in it were directly contrary to my known and avowed principles both then and now: so it was always notoriously known, that it was another person who without any forgery could use that name, whose subscription it was, as will be acknowledged by the survivors of the subscribers. I confess when the paper itself was first brought to me (as it was by a learned person now in the University of Oxford) I expressed some indignation against it; as supposing that I had been then dealt withal, as I have been of late, by putting my name unto what I was no way concerned in. But quickly hearing that he who had subscribed that name, had right so to do; it being his own as well as mine, (though I find since also that there was in it, some intention to deceive) I gave neither him nor myself any trouble about it. In like manner the same author affirms, that some persons at their return from their conquest at Ireland, were made doctors at Oxford by J O whereas one of the persons mentioned, never came out of Ireland; and the other never came to Oxford

after his return; but had indeed with another person that ceremony of respect shewed unto him sometime before in that university, not by J O but by E R [Edward Reynolds] now Lord Bishop of Norwich.

But I crave the reader's pardon for this diversion especially, having turned aside into a dirty road, wherein there is not anything of Christian sobriety, or common ingenuity from first to last to be found. Yet what violences have been offered unto the sacred truths of the gospel in important articles of faith, and other things scandalous to Christian religion, will in another way be called to an account, as some of them have been already; whereunto a return may be expected of raging and bestial calumnies, and no other. Here I shall not farther indispose the reader unto the serious perusal and improvement of the ensuing spiritual discourses, wherein there is more worth and use, more that will turn unto a refreshing account at the last day, than in a thousand clamorous contests managed with pride and passion, whatever pretences they may be gilded withal.

That he who ministered this seed to the sower, would multiply the seed sown, and give it an increase in the fruits of righteousness among them that through his providence shall be made partakers of it, is the prayer of

Thy Servant in the work of the gospel,

John Owen.

*Joshua Monroe, originally from Amarillo, Texas, lives in Louisville, Kentucky. He holds both a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.*



# John Owen Timeline<sup>1</sup>

MATTHEW BARRETT



<sup>1</sup> From Matthew Barrett and Michael A.G. Haykin, *Owen and the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).





# AFTER DARKNESS, LIGHT:

## CAREY MINISTERS CONFERENCE 2017

2017 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg, which marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. What is the significance of this for today? Many say that the Reformation was a mistake, and that we should re-unite with the Church of Rome. They suggest that the Roman Catholic Church has now changed, and historic differences should be forgotten. Leonardo De Chirico joins us at the Conference to bring his insights on the current Pope, Roman Catholic teaching on Justification, and the significance of Vatican II.

Positively, what are the enduring principles which underlie the Reformation? We are delighted to welcome Rupert Bentley-Taylor to the Carey, who will be preaching on the themes of the 'Power of the Word' and the 'Power of the Gospel'.

Linda Allcock will be leading the women's track, teaching the book of Titus and demonstrating the abiding relevance of God's word and the message of grace in an ungodly culture. Paul Gibson will give a biography of Martin Luther; the remarkable testimony of a flawed man greatly used in the purposes of God. John Benton will speak to us on the flaws of Christian leaders today, drawing lessons from the psychology of Samson. And Ian Fry will bring us the contemporary challenge of raising a new generation which delights in the glory of God.

### Programme:

#### Tuesday 3 January

- » Paul Gibson: *Martin Luther*
- » Leonardo De Chirico: *Justification in current Roman Catholic teaching*
- » Women's track: Linda Allcock
- » Rupert Bentley-Taylor: *Power of the Word*

#### Wednesday 4 January

- » Leonardo De Chirico: *Pope Francis: The Joy of the Gospel?*
- » Ian Fry: *The Next Generation*
- » Q&A
- » John Benton: *Grace for flawed leaders – lessons from the psychology of Samson.*

#### Thursday 5 January

- » Leonardo De Chirico: *What Happened at Vatican II?*
- » Women's track – Linda Allcock
- » Rupert Bentley-Taylor: *Power of the Gospel*

### Venue:

The Hayes Conference Centre,  
Swanwick, Derbyshire DE55 1AU  
Tel: 01773 526000

### Cost:

Full conference: £165  
Bible college students: £120  
(Additional lunch on arrival £6.50)  
Day visitors are also welcome,  
please see the website for details.

### Details of the Speakers and Addresses:

**Leonardo De Chirico** planted and pastored a church in Ferrara from 1997, and is currently the pastor of Breccia di Roma, a church that he helped plant in 2009. His PhD was on Roman Catholicism, and he has written *A Christian's Pocket Guide to the Papacy*. He is a lecturer of Historical Theology at IFED in Padova, Italy, the Director of the Reformanda Initiative, and the leader of the Rome Scholars Network (RSN). Dr De Chirico will bring three papers to help us understand contemporary Roman Catholicism. What is their current teaching on Justification, and have differences now been settled on this issue? What should we make of Pope Francis and his seemingly evangelical language, speaking of mission, gospel, and conversion? And what happened at Vatican II (1962-65); what does it mean and what impact is it having on Rome?

**Rupert Bentley-Taylor** was born into a missionary family and lived as a child in the Far East where he came to faith. He taught history for six years and then went on to serve as a pastor for 30 years, firstly in Bournemouth and then in Bath. He also served for three years as the very last FIEC President, and his ministry of preaching and teaching includes preaching training in North India over many years. He and his wife, Margie, are currently involved in a new church, Emmanuel Church, in Bath. Rupert will preach twice, expounding the positive messages of the Reformation: the 'Power of the Word', and the 'Power of the Gospel'.

**Paul Gibson** taught history at a secondary school in Maidenhead before training for Christian ministry at Oak Hill Theological College. Since 2013 he has been serving as Pastor of Wheelock Heath Baptist Church in south Cheshire. 'Martin Luther: Great Reformer, Man of Weakness. On the 500th anniversary of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses we rightly remember how God used him mightily in the Reformation. Yet Luther himself faced many struggles and much weakness in his Christian life. What can we learn for life and ministry today from Luther's experience of the Christian life and how he understood his experience theologically?'

**Ian Fry** is Families Minister at St. Ebbe's Church, Oxford. Prior to this he established the Youth and Children's Ministry Course at Oak Hill College and helped set up Contagious which he and his founding partners – Pete Woodcock and Trevor Pearce – fondly call a Bible-boot camp. 'What must we do with the next generation? The biblical call to ensure the next generation is taught the ways of God coupled with this being the prime responsibility of parents has been lost in the evangelical world. Thankfully this is now being recovered as churches recognise that evangelism is best done through discipleship – as Jesus himself commanded in Matthew 28.'

**John Benton** has been pastor of Chertsey Street Baptist Church, Guildford, for the past 36 years. He is also Managing Editor of the monthly Christian newspaper *Evangelicals Now*. 'God doesn't always choose regular men as leaders. Sometimes he opts for characters who are flawed, unusual and not those that the church would automatically light upon. What if we are men like that? Samson's life is such a mess we can barely believe he is a child of God. Yet Hebrews 11 assures us he is. We can't possibly hold him up as an example of virtue to follow. But what might we learn about ourselves as we consider his life?'

**Linda Allcock** studied at Oxford, where she met Jonty. After seven years in ministry at Enfield Evangelical Free Church they planted Bush Hill Park Community Church in 2008, before moving in 2015 to Central London to plant The Globe Church. Together they have led one of the Contagious Bible Camps since 2000. Linda speaks at various conferences including the London Ministry Wives conference, and the London Women's Convention. 'Being a Christian in a corrupt culture, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by needs, pressures and anxiety. The book of Titus is a clear and refreshing reminder that only knowledge of the truth leads to godliness.'

### Please, Join:

Please plan to join us for the Carey Conference in Swanwick, UK 3rd – 5th January 2017.

Pastors and their wives are warmly welcomed, along with all men and women involved in Christian ministry and leadership.

For full details of the conference venue, facilities and programme please refer to our website: [careyconference.org](http://careyconference.org)

### Booking:

You can book and pay online via the website: [careyconference.org](http://careyconference.org) or by sending payment (cheques payable to 'Carey Conference') to: Lois Collier, The Manse, 47 Long Street, Great Ellingham, Norfolk NR17 1LN

### Contact Us:

W: [careyconference.org](http://careyconference.org)  
E: [loiscollier@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:loiscollier@hotmail.co.uk)  
T: 01953 453347

## India

*Pastor D Stephenson has sent us the following report about the Reformed Baptist Fellowship of India and the recent conference that was held.*



In 2010 twelve Baptist churches in Tamil Nadu which have the same faith have consented to start a fellowship called the Reformed Baptist Fellowship of India (RBF). Every May there will be an annual family conference for our fellowship. This last one was our 6th annual conference with more than 175 people attending.

### Aims:

Our chief aim is to uphold the 1689 Confession of Faith, to spread the doctrines of grace in our State, to promote Reformed literature in our own language Tamil and to plant churches based on this faith.

### Speakers:

**Dr David Elangovan**, pastor of Reformed Baptist Church, Salem, spoke on the subject of the Work of the Holy Spirit.

**Pastor Johnnelson**, from Engleden Gospel Church, Coonoor, spoke on the subject of false prophets.

**Pastor D Stephenson**, pastor of Evangelical Baptist Church, Madurai, spoke on the subject of Tithing.

### Our ministry:

Every month for one year, I take special theology classes for 200 pastors (who are basically from Pentecostal and Charismatic backgrounds) in different places like Kadayampatti, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Omalur, Oothankarai, Kamuthi and Pudukottai districts. Once in two months, we have our RBF pastore meet at Salem. During January we have our RBF pastore family conference at Madurai. Kindly pray for our ministries and literature work.

## Reflections on Recent African Pastors' Conferences in Zambia

*A Report by Cary G Kimbrell*



I preached in both Ndola and Lusaka, bringing five messages in two days on the general subject of the Church. Three other messages were delivered by Pastor Newton Chilingulo in Ndola and by Pastor Emmanuel Mpeni in Lusaka. Also, along with the preaching, a vital part of the conference was the selling of good and sound theological books. APC is able to sell the books at greatly, almost ridiculously, reduced prices because of the subsidies of generous donors. If the books were not so discounted, they would be out of the financial reach of almost all, if not all, of the participants.

I joined the team on Monday morning in Ndola. Johan Grobler, a South African, and Markus Pilz, a young Austrian, drove from Johannesburg beginning on Wednesday, 8 June, and were joined by Newton and Emmanuel in Lusaka on Friday night, 10<sup>th</sup> June. They went to Ndola on Saturday. Dr George Palo met them and took them to a missionary housing compound in Ndola. They stayed there and it was at this venue that I met them on Monday, after Dr Palo met me at the airport. This team was quite international, made up of men from four countries and three continents.

In Ndola the crowd started small, but grew as the first session started and continued

growing throughout the day, which has been typical in my experience in Africa. This was my second time to be in Zambia. I was there a year earlier with APCs. The pastors and church teachers who were there really received the messages well, seeming eager to learn about what the church is and how Christ builds his church. Their interest was maintained, and maybe even grew, as the subject of preaching was broached. Almost every person in the congregation keenly gave his attention to the preaching, many of them showing genuine excitement at hearing these subjects.

Between the sessions they continuously perused the stock of books and bought them, never less than five persons standing before Markus as he helped them with their purchases. Both Markus and Johan did a great job managing and selling the books.

It continued at the same pace the second day as well. The attitude toward the preaching and the zeal for buying books did not diminish at all, maybe even increasing. Pastor Newton Chilingulo preached well his assigned topics even though, because of time restraints, he had to trim his last message since Bethel City Church, our host, had to turn the building around quickly for a meeting they were having later that afternoon.

We quickly started the certificate ceremony, presenting a certificate to each participant. This is a very important event for the Zambian pastors, I was told. We also took the group picture with me being the only non-African in the bunch. The number of registrants in Ndola was forty-eight, though we had prepared for eighty. The turnout was disappointing, but we were happy for the ones who were there. They were receptive and appreciative.

Then it ended as quickly as it began. We loaded the remaining books and went to the place where we were staying, preparing to ride to Lusaka to start all over again on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June, minus Newton who had a flight back to his home, Lilongwe, Malawi, for a prior engagement.

Dr Palo asked me if I could speak at a Pastors' fraternal meeting on Wednesday morning before we departed for Lusaka. The team agreed to stay until 10.00 am so I could speak to the fraternal. At the meeting there were about fifty in attendance. Again, they were warm and receptive, praying for us as we departed, asking God to give us safe travel and effectiveness in our ministry of the Word.

So after the fraternal meeting, off we went to Lusaka, a five-hour drive, arriving around four. There we met Pastor Isaac Makashinyi at the Amanda Hill Mall in downtown Lusaka, so he could guide us to the venue, Kamwala Reformed Church. This was the venue the local APC coordinator, Lichawa Thole had set up, a wonderful choice and good job by Pastor Thole.

Once we arrived at Kamwala we were met by an elder, Gabriel, a deacon, Gideon, and



 Pastor Kimbrell preaching

the pastor, Daniel Daika and his wife. They were so pleased to host the conference and, together with the members of the church, had spent many hours organising it. They walked us through the facility, asking if it was suitable. I had never experienced in my limited time with APC such precise administration from the host church. The other hosts were good; this was excellent.

After the meeting with the host church, Johan, Markus, and Emmanuel were taken to their accommodations at St Paul Presbyterian Church. Again, they were met by a deacon from St Paul who personally showed the men to their rooms and prepared them supper giving them a choice of different menu items even though the hour was late.

On Thursday we began the conference on time. Books were purchased and then the preaching began. The Zambians kept coming and kept registering until the number reached 220. We were all overwhelmed and surprised at the number, but greater than the number was the spirit in the place. No frustrations, no disappointments even when, because of the number, we ran out of food the ladies in the church had prepared. No problem, Pastor Daniel had the ladies to prepare more and announced within minutes to the group that the five persons who had not gotten their meal could now go to the kitchen because their meal was

ready. It was as smooth as any correction I have seen. The next day they adjusted and had two distribution points and fed the large crowd in less time than the day before with plenty of food.

We also had a slight problem with the book purchases. The queues were long and the time was too short for the purchases. The book area was just off the pulpit to the left and the queues, if not adjusted, would have to stretch in front of the preacher as he was delivering his message. At first we had to call them away from the purchasing process. We later thought it would be better to start each session with a chorus to alert the people that the service was about to start without having to bluntly call them away from the table.

Oh my! What singing! Pastor Daniel led it with his beautiful voice and the singing was almost angelic to my ear. Though some of the songs were in Bemba, which I could not understand, my heart was still stirred. It truly helped me in my preaching, setting my heart ablaze. The people responded well to the musical call, but the problem of time for purchasing was still there. I suggested since getting the books in their hands was as important as getting the preaching in their ears, that we should allow them to purchase during the sermons. They could hear the sermons from the queue as well as from the pew.

To keep the queue short, so it would not cover the preacher, the ushers would bring the participants by groups of five to the purchasing table. So they took the books with them to their pew and then came when quietly and subtly called to the queue to finish their transactions. Pastor Daniel

was concerned at first about the process saying that he could not preach with such a distraction at the left of the pulpit, but I said, 'I can.' So we did, and it worked out wonderfully well. It was very respectful and even reverent in spirit. It allowed us to make double use of the time. The preaching times were unusual. The energy was flowing from both directions, pulpit to pew, pew to pulpit. At times I felt as if I had left the pulpit and became a part of the congregation, as eager to hear what would be said as those who were listening to the preaching. Quite an experience! I have experienced this in other preaching times in my life, and maybe all preachers do, but it was extraordinary here. The power of the Spirit was palpable. Everything was flowing well, no confusion, no frustrations, no arrogant displays of pride, all working as a team with one heart to the glory of our God and his Christ, our Lord.

On the first day after I had preached, one of the elders of the church, Gabriel, came to me and whispered that a woman outside would like to speak to me. It puzzled me but I went thinking maybe someone was in distress of soul. When I got outside there was a young lady with a microphone and a man with a TV camera. They were from the National News Media and wanted to ask me about the significance of this meeting to the nation of Zambia. Pastor Makashinyi quickly came to my rescue, speaking much more eloquently about the meeting since he is a Zambian and very familiar with the APC conferences.

The young lady also asked me about the Zambian elections. I immediately confessed my ignorance of the political situation, but added that the Zambian people should look at the lives of the



candidates and not just listen to their words. I also told her that God would raise up the next president of Zambia, either to bless the nation, or judge it. Incidentally, I did not see the report on television but was told it was aired on some radio stations. One never knows what doors the Lord may open as one serves him and his people. No one could have planned this.

The second day was as the first. It was a delightful time in the Lord. The fellowship was warm and the preaching times unusually attended with the power of the Spirit. As I ponder what happened, I am reminded that for each pastor in attendance there is the potential of reaching about 100 people. Even though not everyone there was a pastor, if 200 pastors were there, and they were moved to share the truths of the messages with their congregations, the potential impact could be 20,000 souls. This was a magnificent opportunity to impact Zambia with the Reformed doctrines of gospel truth.

At one moment during my last message, we could hear Muslim prayers in the background from a nearby mosque. I had never experienced such, so I asked, 'Are those Muslim prayers?' Some in the crowd said yes. I then said, 'Well, let us drown out these Muslim prayers with praise to our Christ and with gospel preaching.' Then I went right back to my previous point. Many in the crowd seemed shocked that I would mention the prayers, but others responded affirmatively to my request. Then the prayers stopped at the mosque, but the praise to Christ and gospel truths in our gathering did not.

I will not soon forget my time in Zambia. I want to thank the leaders of APC, and all who worked so hard to make these conferences possible, for inviting me to be a small part of what God is doing through them. May he continue to give continual and abiding blessings to APC as they lead conferences all over Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa for his glory.

### Other APC News: Recent Conferences

Conferences have been held in May in South Africa, Swaziland and in June in Zambia (see report by Pastor Cary Kimbrell above) for which we have received the following statistics (right).

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	NO. BOOKS Sold & Free
South Africa	Hazyview	23	289
South Africa	Barberton	56	736
Swaziland	Manzini	19	309
Zambia	Ndola	48	904
Zambia	Lusaka	224	2538

The conference in Barberton was very encouraging and showed an increase in the number of delegates. The delegates in Hazyview were very keen to ask more questions and stayed behind

after the Q & A session to do so. Delegate numbers in Manzini were down as the organiser's email was hacked and sadly, he lost his contacts just before the conference. The total number of books distributed since the inception of APC in 2006 now stands at 83751.



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### Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from  
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