

## “Mortification”

From John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Book III, 3.20, English updated and emphasis added.

***Repentance entails mortification—putting to death the old man and its sinful ways.***

20. Moreover, as **hatred of sin**, which is the beginning of repentance, first gives us access to the knowledge of Christ, who manifests Himself to none but miserable and afflicted sinners, groaning, laboring, burdened, hungry, and thirsty, pining away with grief and wretchedness, so if we would stand in Christ, we must aim at repentance, cultivate it during our whole lives, and continue it to the last.

Christ came to call sinners, but to call them to repentance. He was sent to bless the unworthy, but by “turning away every one” “from his iniquities.” The Scripture is full of similar passages. Hence, when God offers forgiveness of sins, He in return usually stipulates for repentance, intimating that His mercy should induce men to repent. “Keep ye judgment,” He says, “and do justice: for My salvation is near to come.” Again, “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.” Again, “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him.” “Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Here, however, it is to be observed, that repentance is not made a condition in such a sense as to be a foundation for meriting pardon; no, it rather indicates the end at which they must aim if they would obtain favor, God having resolved to take pity on men for the express purpose of leading them to repent.

Therefore, **so long as we dwell in the prison of the body, we must constantly struggle with the vices of our corrupt nature**, and so with our natural disposition.

Plato sometimes says, that the life of the philosopher is to meditate on death. More truly may we say, that **the life of a Christian man is constant study and exercise in mortifying [putting to death] the flesh, until it is certainly slain, and the Spirit of God obtains dominion in us.** Wherefore, he seems to me to have made most progress who has learned to be most dissatisfied with himself.

He does not, however, remain in the miry clay without going forward; but rather hastens and sighs after God, that, engrafted both into the death and the life of Christ, he may constantly meditate on repentance.

Unquestionably those who have a genuine hatred of sin cannot do otherwise: for no man ever hated sin without being previously enamored of righteousness. This view, as it is the simplest of all, seemed to me also to accord best with Scripture truth.