John Owen

**[1616 – 1683]**

1. Owen was the most towering theologian England ever produced. Known as “the John Calvin of England”.  J. I. Packard describes him as “the greatest of Puritan theologians.” In many respects, Owen is the most towering “redwood in this forest” of the Puritans. Spurgeon describes him as, “The mighty master of theology.” He was a prolific writer.
2. Puritan son: 1616–1637.  His father was a Puritan pastor. “I was bred from my infancy in the care of my father who was a nonconformist, & a powerful laborer in the Vineyard of the Lord. He received his early education from his father. Puritans homeschooled because their children were not permitted to go to schools.
3. He attended Oxford at age 12 and was not yet saved. He entered Queens College, Oxford, which was something of a finishing school for the upper class. He excelled in the classics. He had a broad Liberal Arts education. He took classes in logic, [with the standard textbook written by Isaac Watts], mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, theology, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and rabbinical writings. In future years many of his works were written in Latin which was the scholastic language of the day. At age 15 or 16 he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1632. He then pursued a master’s degree, and then a Bachelor of Divinity degree which was a seven year program. In 1630, Oxford fell under the influence of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, [who we talked about already].  Laud was appointed to bring a non-Puritan influence over all of England which would include Oxford - the leading university of the time. Owen could not stay at Oxford any longer.
4. He became a private Chaplain, 1637–1642. Many families who lived on large estates would employ him as chaplain to teach. He would live with them and conduct family worship, AM & PM services, and instructed the children during the day. This chaplaincy gave him time for deeper reading and study of theology.
5. His salvation: 1642. Until then he did not have assurance of salvation, & the reason is he probably was not saved yet. The Puritans were big on personal conversion, and they broke from the Church of England which taught a form of baptismal regeneration.  The text in the worship service was “Why are you fearful you of little faith”. He felt as if God was tapping him on the shoulder speaking directly to him. [What was the converting text in your life?] That very year he moved to London. 1642 was the beginning of the English Civil War. The king is fighting against the parliament. In this same year at 26, he launched his writing ministry. Like Calvin writing The Institutes in the 2ND year of his conversion, Owen, in the 1ST year of his conversion begins his prodigious writing ministry which extended to 41 years.
6. Fordham Pastor, 1644–1649.  He took the vow of nonconformity refusing to align himself with the Church of England. He married Mary Rook, and she would bear 11 children, ten of which would die in infancy. Like with Rutherford, before God can use a man in an unusual way, God must first break him. John Owen was being crushed and made by God into a fit vessel for Him. The one daughter who lived beyond infancy died shortly after she married. At age 28 he stood before Parliament and preached. Invited back again at age 30 to preach. At age 31, he wrote his most celebrated work on the atonement. The Death Of Death In The Death Of Christ, 1648. He’s been called one of the most stringent defenders of limited atonement. Christ secured salvation for all for whom He died. How could Christ satisfy the justice of those who were in hell thousands of years ago through the Old Testament? See Matthew 1:21. He came to save His people from their sins. Jn 17:9 – He intercedes not for the world but for those whom the Father has given to me.
7. Royal chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, 1649-1650.  The day after Charles the 1ST was beheaded, January 30, 1649, the nation looked to John Owen to preach to the Parliament. He called Parliament to put their faith and trust in God. He believes in limited atonement, but also believes in the offer of salvation to all.  Oliver, recognizing the treasure that John Owen is, takes him under his arm as chaplain and has him go wherever he goes. Owen ministers the Word of God to the troops. When they come to Trinity College in Ireland, Cromwell puts Trinity College under the leadership of John Owen. Owen is deeply affected by the war and the slaughter of so many Irishmen. He comes back to London and preaches to Parliament on how Christ was being preached as a lion and not as a lamb with his blood spilt out for sinners. In other words, we should’ve been preaching the gospel rather than slaughtering them. The final battle was waged in this war - the siege at Drogheda, September 3–11, 1649. Owen becomes the official preacher to the State at the Royal Palace of Whitehall. [No Buckingham Palace in that day]. John Owen lived in Whitehall. He is placed in a very prominent position in the nation at the right hand of Oliver Cromwell, and he becomes a counselor to Oliver Cromwell. He also becomes the chief influencer in Oliver’s life and in his thinking giving him a Christian worldview. Cromwell takes John Owen with him to the Scotland interwar. All of this is in his early 30s. As Cromwell has become Lord Protector of England, Cromwell understood that the leading influence in all of England was Oxford University. To control Oxford would be to control the next generation of leaders. Cromwell placed John Owen as the head of the entire University of Oxford. He will be the Vice Chancellor of Oxford from 1651 to 1660, the most esteemed university in the entire world at this point. As Vice Chancellor he is in reality the Chancellor because the actual Chancellor is Oliver Cromwell, but he has delegated everything to John Owen and John Owen now presides over the University. He establishes reformed doctrine and Puritan piety on the campus. He preached to the students. He regulated the religious life of the entire university and preached on alternative Sundays with Thomas Goodwin. He preached a series of sermons on The Mortification Of Sin, which became one of the leading Christian classics of all times. “Either sin will kill you or you must kill sin.” Colossians 3:5. We must deal aggressively with sin in our lives. Description of his preaching power: very graceful behavior in the pulpit and elocution. The persuasion of his oratory wins the affections of his admiring audience almost as if he pleased. Not just a gifted tongue, but a gifted voice. A powerful expositor of the Word of God as he stands before people magnifying Christ. He is able to move them to love Christ, follow and pursue Him. Called upon repeated times to preach to the Parliament and was asked by leaders for counsel. He was at the very center of the intersection of the nation. In the circles of power, he knew the social graces of how to fit in well with those who are in the upper class, with those who are at Oxford, and with the most profound professors on campus. His sermons are taken down as classics. He writes the definitive work on the atonement. He has never been surpassed in all of England for his theological brilliance. In many ways he stood on the shoulders of Calvin and perhaps reached even higher to bring clarity and understanding to specific theological issues. And yet, it’s all connected to the Christian life. It’s not just that he had a brilliant mind in his writings, but he wanted it to affect their daily life and how they lived for God. The Mortification Of Sin, 1656, is all about the pursuit of holiness and the pursuit of godliness. He could not stand antinomianism for a moment [that it doesn’t really matter how you live your Christian life. This is all in God’s saving grace so I can live how I want to live.] John Owen says, “No we must live in obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We must resist temptation, flee from the devil, and we must put to death sin in our lives.” Christians must make it their business all of the day to mortify the indwelling power of sin.  Mortify sin or sin will have a devastating effect in your life. In other words, sin will "eat you for lunch" if you don’t make it your business to kill it. You can’t allow sin to establish a beach hold in your mind or your heart to allow it to fester and grow, and for you not to confess it, and for you not to repent of it. To not put it out of your life, is like having a rattlesnake loose in your bedroom at night. Not knowing when it will strike you and when it will put its venom into your veins. There must be the hatred of sin as sin. The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh. There must always be a crucifixion and resurrection taking place simultaneously in your life.
8. The Savoy Declaration: This was the coming together of all the independents - Bible Church people, those who are not denominational, just independent. John Owen became the principal architect of this declaration.
9. Secluded preacher: 1660–1683, Charles the 2nd returned from France. The English Monarch was restored. In 1662, 2000 Puritan pastors were put out of the pulpit and places of influence. John Owen was rejected.
10. When Charles the 2ND returns, he removes Owen from being the head of Oxford University. Ejected from his pulpit preaching there on campus. Given offer to be a pastor in Boston, but he refuses and he chooses to go to London after the London fire. He goes there and preaches in little underground places. This is why we have so much of John Owen’s writings. Because he can’t be in a highly visible pulpit. Confined to private study. He writes a massive commentary on the book of Hebrews. He’s a Trinitarian man. His focus was on Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, not off on secondary issues. He came to be known as the theologian of the Holy Spirit. Some of his profound work deals with the subject of regeneration - the new birth, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and New Testament times. And how there is a monotheistic regeneration of the spiritually dead sinner who is granted life, who is raised from the dead, God given God’s gift of repentance, enabled by God to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. **One must be** born again and the first act is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. His wife died, and he soon remarries. He begins to suffer physically from asthma and gall stones.
11. The last book he writes entitled: "The Glory of Christ". There's no greater subject matter. He unleashes his theological profundity and is reduced to being a little child looking up at the glory of Christ. *“*On Christ’s glory *I would fix my eyes, and the more I see of the glory of Christ, the more painted beauties of this world will weather in my eyes and I will be more and more crucified to this world. It will become to me like something dead and putrid. Impossible for me to enjoy. I find my enjoyment in Christ. No man shall behold the glory of Christ who is not in someway held there by faith. It is the mark of true saving faith to be attracted to the holiness of Christ.”*
12. Persevering believer, 1683: Before he dies, he writes to a friend, “I am going to Him whom my soul has loved or rather who has loved me with an everlasting love which is the whole ground of my consolation. I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but while the great pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under rower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray and hope and wait patiently and do not despond. The hope is invincible that He will never leave us or for sake us.

On his deathbed, William Payne comes into the room, and he has the first page of The Glory of Christ off the printing press. John Owen will literally go from glory to glory. Owen responded, “I’m glad to hear that The Glory of Christ is now off the printed press, but now the longing wish for day has come at last in which I will see that glory in a manner in which I was incapable of doing in this world. After he died, there was a parade in Bunhill Field outside the city limits and his tomb is written,

*“Owen must be counted among the most distinguished of this age. The polemical theology with “Herculean” strength he strangled three poisonous serpents, the Armenian, the Socinian, and the Roman. In practical theology he laid out before others the whole of the activity of the Holy Spirit which he had first experienced in his own heart according to the rule of the Word. A scribe, John Owen, a scribe instructed in every way for the kingdom of God. His pure light of gospel truth shown forth on many in private, on more from the pulpit, and on all in his printed works pointing everyone to the same goal and, in this shining forth, as he and others gradually recognized, he fully squandered his strength till it was gone. His soul holy longing to enjoy God more, left the shattered ruins of his once handsome body full of permanent weakness, attacked by frequent diseases, worn out most of all by hard work, and no longer a fit instrument for serving God. On a day rendered dreadful for many by earthly powers, but now made happy for him through the power the gospel, August 25, 1683, he was sixty seven years old”.*