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**Aaron Prelock**

# The Pastoral Disposition in the Thought of John Owen

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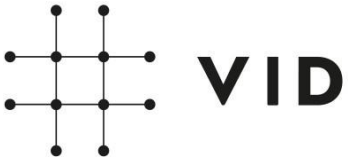

# THE PASTORAL DISPOSITION IN THE THOUGHT OF JOHN OWEN

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As this is a theological project, it is only appropriate to state that if there is anything of value either for historical theology or pastoral ministry: Soli Deo Gloria.

## Abstract

John Owen is presented in scholarship as a statesman, an academic, and a theologian. Though it is widely acknowledged that he was a pastor throughout his lifetime, little attention has been paid to his pastoral theology or the broader pastoral context of his life's work. In this project, I argue that Owen's mature pastoral theology depends significantly on his work on the Holy Spirit, building particularly upon the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification. These twin emphases form the background to his focus on the nature of pastoral work, a focus that prioritises the being of the pastor before the actions of the pastor. This emphasis in Owen's work not only addresses issues that were of concern to him in the 17th century, but it also answers pressing questions in contemporary pastoral theology as well.

The first chapter will provide a brief evaluation of contemporary practical theology and set the framework for why an exploration of Owen's pastoral theology is important from the perspectives of both historical and practical theology. The second and third chapters will examine the historical basis for the concept of *habitus* and Owen's adaptation of the scholastic ontological framework for his own theological purposes. The fourth and fifth chapters will look at how Owen uses *habitus* in his development of the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification. The sixth and seventh chapters focus on the nature and action of the pastor in Owen's mature pastoral theology as dependent upon the previously explored theological emphases.

# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1 – Pastoral Theology, *Habitus*, and John Owen

This project is a combination of pastoral theology and historical theology.[1] I will be using the broader methodology of church history to study the reformed development of the concept of the pastoral disposition ("disposition" from the Latin: *habitus*) in the thought of mid-17th century academic, political activist, theologian, and pastor John Owen (1616-1683).[2] It is my contention that Owen offers a consistent and theologically integrated perspective on pastoral ministry that points to the need for pastoral theology to prioritise being over doing.

The goal of this project is to explore Owen's distinctly reformed contribution to the understanding of the dispositional nature of practical theology and pastoral practice. To do this, in chapter 2 I will explore the medieval formulation of the *habitus* idea as well as show the tradition from which Owen received it. In chapter 3 I will examine some of the particularities of Owen's understanding of *habitus* as well as compare his perspective with the Thomist tradition in which he was trained. These two chapters will necessarily be the most metaphysical, but I trust the relevance of metaphysics to pastoral theology will be made clear in due time. Then in chapters 4 and 5 I will explain where the *habitus* idea fits in Owen's broader theological development, particularly within his elaboration of the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification. Understanding this theological foundation is of critical importance to seeing the distinctive contribution of Owen's emphasis on *habitus*, particularly as he uses it in a pastoral context. The last two chapters will look at how Owen applies the

[1] See Anthony Bradley and Richard Muller, *Church History: an Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 4-11; and Richard Muller, *The Study of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 98-101 for more on the fluidity of definitions between church history, historical theology, and history of doctrine. Following these treatments, I have chosen the term historical theology rather than the others for my project, as I am studying the specific theological formulation and practice of an idea in the thought of one individual but considered within his context in the larger history of the church in reformation and post reformation studies.

[2] The second chapter of this project will offer more on the specifics of why "disposition" is the preferred English translation of *habitus*.

*habitus* concept specifically to pastoral ministry. I will focus on what the pastoral disposition is in chapter 6 and how the pastoral disposition is used in chapter 7.

This may seem to take the long way around to get to the topic of the pastoral disposition. There are two reasons, however, that make it necessary to take this approach. First, Owen's writing is notoriously cumbersome. He rarely explains his terms, he uses multiple related terms for the same or similar concepts, and he frequently expects his readers to know the scholastic context of the specific terminology he uses, all potential hazards for the present day reader and gaining an accurate understanding of Owen's writing. Second, Owen's later theology builds on earlier developments. For this reason, I will provide the broader theological context for Owen's concept of disposition, a context that his later development of the pastoral disposition relies upon but does not make explicit. It is my contention that Owen's concept of the pastoral disposition depends on and builds from the foundation of a theology of regeneration and sanctification. If one does not firmly grasp this theological underpinning, then the understanding of the pastoral disposition will lack the very emphases Owen maintains are essential in his work.

Laying the groundwork may seem tedious at first, but it will result, I trust, in a much more full and satisfying explanation at the end. The path of theological retrieval that I have chosen ensures that the reader will understand what Owen means when he writes of the pastoral disposition, both in metaphysics and in theology, for in Owen these are two intertwined disciplines. But first, why is a historical analysis of the theological use of *habitus* even a relevant topic for the study of pastoral theology?

**Contemporary Pastoral Theology**

A definition of pastoral theology would be helpful, but even here we find ourselves in one of the key problems. Defining the discipline is far more complicated than one would

expect. Two of the leading proponents of the discipline argue that because of the numerous questions surrounding its goal and definition, "Practical theology is problematic."[3] They are not alone in this concern, for it seems to be a regular problem of those engaged in the task of writing contemporary pastoral theology that they feel the need to justify their existence and the legitimacy of their task.[4] The core problems in pastoral theology relate to "its nature and purpose, its form and methodology," and crucial questions about its relationship to the other theological disciplines.[5] One could define it according to its history, or to its current goals, or according to its methodology, but it is precisely these areas that make a straightforward definition of pastoral theology complicated.

Another significant aspect of this difficulty comes from the substantial changes the discipline of practical theology has undergone in the last half century. Though previous generations of theological studies devoted significant amounts of time and study to the

[3] Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 2nd edition, (London: SPCK, 2006), 11. I take both "pastoral theology" and "practical theology" to refer to significantly overlapping (if not in substance synonymous) disciplines of theological development with a specifically applied component, often through the life of the church. While there are distinct nuances to each term, and while there is also a considerable movement in the field of practical theology to develop practical theology outside a particular ecclesiastical context, some of the distinction in terminology may be a denomination preference for a certain historical nomenclature rather than a substantive distinction between disciplines. The validity of this assumption is shown in Seward Hiltner's *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958) being widely considered as the beginning of the 20th century renaissance of practical theology. See *The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed by David J. Atkinson and David H. Field, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 42-43; Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 9-10. For more on the distinction or lack thereof between practical theology and pastoral theology see Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, "An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology*, ed James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 1-3; John Reader, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 4-9; and *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, ed Rodney J. Hunter, (Nashville, Tenn. Abingdon Press, 1990), 867-872, 934-936.

[4] For a helpful overview of practical theology and its relation to the systemisation of theology see Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, 59-61. Also Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 358-361. See the second chapter of Ballard and Pritchard's *Practical Theology in Action* for a helpful discussion on why practical theology ought to be considered among the other branches of academic theology. Hiltner argues for the necessity of practical theology to "be as systematic as any other branch of theology" in "The Meaning and Importance of Pastoral Theology," *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology*, 38-41. See Richard Osmer for a defence of practical theology as a particularly unique yet still interdependent discipline in *Practical Theology: an Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 240-241. Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr. argue that practical theology *must* be pursued in an "interdisciplinary effort" with the other theological disciplines in "Graphing the Contours of Black Practical Theology," in *Black Practical Theology*, ed. Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr., (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 299-300.

[5] Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 11.

development of pastoral theology as an extension of their studies in systematic, biblical, and dogmatic theology, there are relatively few substantial works of fully integrated practical theology published today.[6] Much of this seems to be deliberate, and practical theologians frequently seem to see themselves as engaging in a new and even self-contained rather than interdependent discipline, one which began in the late 18th century and experienced a significant reorientation in the mid-20th century.[7] Despite this trend, Methodist theologian Thomas Oden laments the decline of studies in pastoral theology, "In recent decades, pastoral theology has suffered from the neglect of sustained theoretical reflection and from isolation from companion theological disciplines."[8] In order to maintain a holistic approach to pastoral ministry, "pastoral theology must not be artificially detached from homiletics, liturgics, or catechetics, as if these disciplines could go their own way without interacting with one

[6] A cursory look at the catalogue of any major library will bear this out. Perhaps some of this is due to a 'decisive break' that was made during the latter half of the 20th century in the study of pastoral theology. See Osmer, *Practical Theology*, ix. Oden's complaint is just: "Many persons who have been already many years engaged in ministry have never had the opportunity to read (or even see!) a systematic pastoral theology. Few have been attempted in this century. Hiltner's *Preface* is exactly that. Martin Thornton's *Pastoral Theology* is a superb collection of miscellaneous essays on sacramental theology and pastoral themes, but it makes no claim of covering the broad range of the standard pastoral theologies of the preceding century (Sailer, Nitzsch, Cannon, Shedd, Kidder). Recent works by Oates, Brister, Browning, Thornton, Southard, Stein, Stollberg, and Switzer are admirable in their attempts to treat various discrete themes of pastoral theology, yet none of them has attempted to write a systematic pastoral theology that covers the basic range of their distinguished predecessors like Vinet of Hoppin. Pastoral theology as a unifying discipline was flourishing a century ago and remained robust until the beginning of this century, yet it has largely faded into such hazy memory that none of its best representatives is still in print." In Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), xii. And Oden wrote this in 1983. For a critique of Oden's practical theology see Graham, *Transforming Practice,* 75-76. The bibliographies in works such as *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology* or by authors such as Jane Leach, John Ballard, and John Pritchard also demonstrate this point. Practical theology today is done with respect to specific instances or crises in the lives of those in or around the church rather than as a part of a systematic and comprehensive whole within the broader world of theological studies. Multi-author collaborative works such as the *Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology*, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, and *Black Practical Theology,* while they certainly have their place, indicate that an individual emphasis of the treatment of practical theology as a self-conscious exploration of one's own larger theological project may be a thing of the past. Surely a theologically integrated practical means more than simply development practical theology as a member of a particular denomination, as much of the contemporary field of practical theology is developed within certain denominational situations. The desirability of Oden's attempt then is in working out what it is in a theological or ecclesiastical tradition that makes a particular and denominationally unique theological perspective useful for practical theology.

[7] See Osmer, *Practical Theology*, ix-x; Christian Grethlein, *An Introduction to Practical Theology*, tr by Uwe Rasch, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016), 5-27; Pattison and Woodward, "An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology,* 2, 24; also Paul Ballard, "Pastoral and Practical Theology in Britain," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 60-67.

[8] Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, xi.

another."[9] The many studies in practical/pastoral theology that are attempted today are largely issue specific or popular rather than comprehensive or systematic, and this is by design.[10] Practical theology, as a discipline, has changed.[11] Despite the well-founded concerns about a practical theology becoming myopic when it is developed only within the context of systematic theology, rather than seeking to re-establish ties between practical theology and the other theological disciplines the trend has been to question whether the applied theology form of practical theology belongs in the context of more advanced theological education at all.[12]

Yet this change does not come without a cost. Part of this difficulty in even defining the nature and purpose of practical theology seems to have come from a desire to remove the development of practical theology from its previous focus of development as a part of each particular confessional context. An unintended consequence of this development is that a structurally disconnected view of pastoral theology can lead to chasing problems rather than offering solutions. The development of the discipline then becomes reactive rather than proactive. "To this day, a crisis concept has been the ring force of Practical Theology. It defines its concerns from the perspectives of crises, that is problematic situations that require innovative action."[13] Large ecumenical works on the topic of practical theology self-consciously work to avoid denomination-specific formulations of theological questions and unique theological aims in the tasks of pastoral theology for ministers. Yet there are dangers in attempting to engage in any moral or theological enterprise in a deliberately "tradition-free" environment.[14] In fact, the more we look at any theological topic, the more we see that

[9] Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, xi. Grethlein, *An Introduction to Pastoral Theology*, 253.
[10] David Willows and John Swinton, eds, *Spiritual Disciplines of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 11-13; Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 95-96.
[11] David Lyall, "So, What Is Practical Theology?" in *Practical Theology*, (volume 2, number 2, 2009), 157-158.
[12] Margaret Whipp, *SCM Studyguide to Pastoral Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2013), 1, 191.
[13] Grethlein, *An Introduction to Practical Theology*, 10.
[14] "But the history of attempts to construct a morality for tradition-free individuals, whether by an appeal to one out of several conceptions of universalizability or to one out of equally multifarious conceptions of utility or

"the role which community and tradition play in facilitating our finding the way back and the way forward" is inescapable, and "those who pretend to operate outside any tradition by claiming the ground of rational discourse are themselves guided by the tradition called 'liberalism.'"[15] Artificially separating pastoral and practical concerns from a broader theological foundation risks losing the distinctly theological component of pastoral and practical developments of theology.

When practical theology does deal with the concepts of means or ends, they are rarely integrated with broader theological or exegetical concerns. Ecclesiology is not merely asking questions about the church, it is also seeking to explore the theological foundation for what the church is and how it functions.[16] The common approach today, however, often inadvertently pits the praxis aspect of practical theology against the theological side.

> Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world…In opposition to models which view Practical Theology as applied theology, wherein its task is simply to apply doctrine worked out by other theological disciplines to practical situations, within this definition Practical theology is seen to be a critical discipline which is prepared to challenge accepted assumptions and practices.[17]

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shared intuitions or so some combination of these, has in its outcome, as we noticed at the very outset of this enquiry, been a history of continuously unresolved disputes, so that there emerges no uncontested and incontestable account of what tradition-independent morality consists in and consequently no neutral set of criteria by means of which the claims of rival and contending traditions could be adjudicated." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 334. See the rest of the chapter for the incongruity, and ultimately the impossibility, of attempting to develop a theory completely free of tradition; Alasdair MacIntyre's essay, "Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition," in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*, 326-348. So Carl Trueman, a notable John Owen scholar, has pointed out the futility in doing theological enterprises independent of a clearly defined creedal context in *The Creedal Imperative*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 15.

[15] David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 4. See Alasdair MacIntyre's essay, "Liberalism Transformed into a Tradition," in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality*, 326-348 for the definition of "liberalism" Burrell is using.

[16] See Nicholas Bradbury's article, "Ecclesiology and Pastoral Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 173-181, for a good example of "ecclesiology" being used only in a very vague sense for things that happen in or around a church, rather than as a reference for a particular way of understanding what the church is and how it functions.

[17] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London: SCM Press, 2006), 6-7. Swinton and Mowat insist that their approach corrects the acknowledged problem of the loss of "theology" in "practical theology," yet their emphasis clearly prioritises the experiential element of practical theology rather than the theological element, 7, 75-82; for similar approaches which place a priority on experience before revelation see Pattison and Woodward, "An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 7-9; Hiltner, "Meaning and Importance of Pastoral Theology," *The*

This emphasis on "practices" within practical theology can result, perhaps inadvertently, in a priority on what one done rather than what one is. For pastoral theology to focus on praxis outside of a particular theological context risks missing the key theological points that inform praxis in the first place.

The discipline of pastoral theology does still, however, have within it the means by which this priority can be shifted. Much of the most obvious manifestations of the shift from being to doing has occurred within the last generation, but older pastoral theologies also recognised the need for a theologically integrated form of pastoral theology, particularly if it was to be made useful for specifically pastoral work. Notice one late 20th-century definition of practical theology:

> (1) A field of study in clergy education covering the responsibilities of and activities of the minister and usually including preaching, liturgics, pastoral care, Christian (church) education, and church polity and administration. (2) An area or discipline in clergy education whose subject matter is the life and activity of the church as it exists in the present. (3) An area or discipline of theology whose subject matter is Christian practice and which brings to bear theological criteria on contemporary situations and realms of individual and social action.[18]

While more recent developments in contemporary practical theology see practical theology "not as the practice of theology but as the theology of practice," older interpretations of the discipline saw it as "the means by which the community of faith preserves and protects its identity."[19] Simply put, one could define the older view of practical theology as theology applied to and through a pastoral setting.[20] The tools gained in hermeneutics, exegesis,

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*Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology,* 31-32, 38-41; and Alastair Campbell, "The Nature of Practical Theology," *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology,* ed by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 84-86.

[18] *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling,* 934.

[19] *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, 42.

[20] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, xi, 24-25. Stated differently, practical theology is the application of theology to the tasks of pastoral ministry. Biblical theology, systematic theology, dogmatic theology, homiletics, ethics, pastoral counselling, hermeneutics, and exegesis are all adapted and applied to the specific needs of the congregation in ordinary pastoral life. For more on the distinction or lack thereof between pastoral theology and practical theology, see Pattison and Woodward, "An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 1-3; Reader,

biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, homiletics, ethics, and pastoral counselling, are all adapted and applied to the specific needs of the congregation in a particular pastoral ministry.

Such a perspective on practical and pastoral theology is essential for the life of the church. Theology helps one interpret experience, and experience helps further shape theology. This grounded-ness of theology helps demonstrate the importance of what the church believes. There is something that each theological tradition believes or practises that those within in it feel is helpful to achieve its aims. This is a valuable part of pursuing the project of pastoral theology within a particular theological tradition.[21] Such a priority within practical theology takes the doctrinal standards of that particular denomination or congregation and seeks to apply them, if they are not already applied, to the ordinary life of those within that tradition.[22] Whatever it is that one particular tradition believes that makes it distinct from another tradition, practical theology elaborates that difference in tangible ways so as to establish the reason for its own distinctive existence. Practical theology assumes from the beginning of its project that theology can mean something for life today.[23] As Oden points out, a critical purpose of practical theology is that which "seeks to give clear definition to the tasks of ministry and enable its improved practice."[24] This theologically heavy view of pastoral theology may be unfashionable within the broader field of practical theology today, but the alternatives risk losing the important theological contributions amidst the nearly

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*Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, 4-9; *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 867-872, 934-936; *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology,* 42-45.

[21] Andrews and Smith, *Black Practical Theology*, 7; Claire E. Wolfteich and Annemie Dillen, "Introduction," in *Catholic Approaches in Practical Theology,* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016); 2-6. Herbert Hasinger, "Vatican II, the Legacy of Rahner, and Catholic Distinctives in Practical Theology," in *Catholic Approaches in Practical Theology,* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 258-266.

[22] John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context,* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 238. James Newton Poling, *Rethinking Faith: a Constructive Practical Theology,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 6-7, 137. Poling's work is an attempt to fit the topic of pastoral theology within the more traditional pastoral theology framework of doctrine and application. See the appendices in his work to see Poling work out some of the specifics of his pastoral theology for the ordinary congregant in a church setting.

[23] Eric Stoddart, *Advancing Practical Theology,* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 21; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* 72-73.

[24] Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, x.

infinite practical concerns. The practical side of practical and pastoral theology can almost totally eclipse the theology side, and, as a result, pastoral practice slips its theological moorings.

Thus pastoral theology profits significantly from being developed within a broader theological foundation or confessional situation. Such an approach seems the optimum situation to produce a pastoral theology which is both theological rooted and pastorally sensitive. Currently within pastoral theology, the focus is more often on what one needs to know rather than what one needs to be. Contemporary pastoral theology is missing a transformative element that encourages ministers to grow and progress in their pastoral endeavours not only as pastors but also as Christians. Questions of being and transformation are certainly ideas that Christian theology has spent much time exploring. Is there a theological approach that connects both the theological and pastoral threads, that connects personal and practical concerns with a much larger theological perspective, that deals with what a minister needs to be above and beyond what a minister needs to know, and focuses on transformation, not merely in the lives of the congregation but also in ministers themselves? Such an approach would need to be both theological and situational, both theoretical and practical. Within such a view one would expect to find an emphasis not merely on what the pastor does but also the character formation that makes up the internal component of who a pastor is.

**The *Habitus* model**

We have seen that considering pastoral practice as a matter of being is a neglected aspect in pastoral theology. More commonly, the emphasis in pastoral theology focuses on accomplishing the right ministerial tasks in the right way.[25] But this is surely to consider acts

[25] As does Osmer in his *Practical Theology*, though Osmer recognises that there is more to pastoral leadership than merely "task competence," (p.176-178).

as more important than that which produces acts. Evaluating what stands behind acts and is formative of being brings us to the classical concept of *habitus*, or disposition. Here we find potentially fruitful ground for the development of pastoral theology.

There are various *habitus* models in contemporary practical theology, but these are often disconnected from a consistent and deliberate engagement with a or even any particular theological tradition.[26] Pete Ward references *habitus* in his discussion of practical theology, connecting it with the idea of a sort of "absorbed theology."[27] Others describe it as

> that disposition of the mind and heart from which all Christian action flows. It is a way of being before God and with others such that the responses of Christian discipleship are made holistically and wisely. It engages the whole personality, holding together the reasons of both spiritual wisdom and intellectual commitment… it is the goal and context for all that work, the personal orientation which gives direction to the will.[28]

Here we find an explanation of the *habitus* idea that begins to be more helpful: an aspect of human nature that encompasses all of who a person is and stands before and even produces one's acts. The possibility for useful application of this idea to pastoral theology is readily apparent.

A holistic engagement of the whole person for the purposes of living in light of both God and the Christian community connects the means and goals of pastoral practice. Yet we

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[26] See Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action,* 73-77, with particular attention given to the bibliography on p.76. Ballard and Pritchard even reference Aquinas in their discussion of the *habitus* idea, but without any reference whatsoever to his contribution to the concept. See also Graham, *Transforming Practice,* 94-96, 100-104, 115-117. In pastoral theology *habitus* is often a term which is either connected with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's development of the concept or simply thrown around rather than carefully defined and explored. See *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: an introduction,* ed by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikosky, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), passim; Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 362-363. For a critical engagement with some of the limitations of the application of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to practical theology see Ted A. Smith, "Theories of Practice," in *The WileyBlackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed by Bonnie J. Miller-Mclemore, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014), 246-251. The brief explanation of *habitus* within the topic of "Habit" in the *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, 426-427, is rather less than helpful. Edward Farley's *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) is regularly referenced in these discussions of the *habitus* model, but Farley only tangentially uses the concept this way. He is more concerned to discuss the historical move from theology as a *habitus*, that is to say, theology as "an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal," to theology as a discipline for theological understanding. See Farley, *Theologia,* 31, 35-37, 80-83. While Farley's discussion clearly has relevance for the development of pastoral theology, that is neither his goal nor a subject he explores in his *Theologia*.

[27] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 16-17.

[28] Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action,* 177.

are still left with questions. What precisely is a *habitus*? Where does this *habitus* come from? What does it actually do in the life and practice of the minister to engender such responses? Is it static or developing? These are the very questions that make up the subject matter of "personal formation" and the focus on the pastoral dimension of the spiritual disciplines. Exploring the *habitus* idea within a particular theological tradition would resolve many of these questions, yet that does not seem to be how those who reference *habitus* choose to use it.[29] While it is encouraging to see that the idea does get some attention in its relationship to pastoral practice, most contemporary treatments of this disposition leave one feeling like something is still left to be said on the subject. *Habitus* was long invoked in the discussion of pastoral theology in earlier works of pastoral theology, yet in the most self-consciously theological and confessionally integrated models of pastoral theology written in the last century, particularly from within the reformed tradition, any notion of disposition either for the pastor or the congregation is conspicuously absent.[30]

A previous generation of Lutheran pastoral theology provides one fruitful vein for the exploration of a *habitus* model of pastoral practice. 19th century theologian C. F. W. Walther gives a definition of this concept in his *Pastoral Theology*.

> Pastoral theology is the God-given, practical disposition of the soul, acquired by certain means, by which a minister is equipped to perform all the tasks that come to him in that capacity validly, in a legitimate manner, to the glory of God, and for the advancement of his own and his hearers' salvation.[31]

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[29] Ballard and Pritchard do point to the need to "draw on the tradition" of Christian theology for the right development of practical theology, but this emphasis is not connected to their development of the *habitus* idea. See *Practical Theology in Action*, 92-93.

[30] See Norbert H. Mueller and Gorge Kraus, *Pastoral Theology*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 29-37. They come close to writing about a pastor's disposition without actually referencing this important idea. Oden addresses the importance of considering one's "capacity" and "character" in pastoral matters in his *Pastoral Theology*, 19-22, but this is still a far cry from a developed concept of *habitus*. Even in the works that focus on the canonical metaphor of shepherding as the controlling idea for pastoral ministry, *habitus* is distinctly lacking in any significant emphasis. See Derek Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: Explorations in pastoral theology*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1997); Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010). Charles Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2006), references the "shepherd's disposition," but without any significant development of the idea (p.15). Two notable exceptions, C. F. W. Walther and Harold Senkbeil, will be explored below.

[31] C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 7.

Walther points out "when we call pastoral theology a *disposition*, this is to show that it is not simply an aggregate of known facts, but rather a *disposition* or quality of the soul, a *proficiency* that transforms it with respect to its object."[32] A *habitus* or "disposition" goes deeper and beyond mere knowledge, and it includes the transformative element we have been looking for. Here again we find ourselves getting closer to something of a pastorally useful and theologically rooted concept to help us develop the idea of pastoral theology as a matter of being. Ministers require a certain disposition for the right performance of their responsibilities in the church. Walther addresses what exactly this disposition is, the source of the disposition, and what ministers do with the disposition.[33] But as important as Walther's definition is, he largely references it at the beginning of this work then leaves it alone for the rest of his *Pastoral Theology*. Nor is there any explanation of how Walther came to his definition or of the theological tradition that produced it.

Harold Senkbeil's recent volume, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart,* connects *habitus* with pastoral theology, also from a Lutheran perspective. He gives us a taste of what fertile material for pastoral theology can result from the *habitus* concept when it is connected with a broader theological development. But while his work is self-consciously rooted in the Lutheran tradition and is remarkably replete with provocative insight for pastoral theology, again, *habitus* is simply plucked out of Walther's *Pastoral Theology* with little to no connection to or exploration of the theological tradition which birthed it.[34] Contemporary explorations of *habitus* and its connection to pastoral theology leave the reader interested yet unsatisfied. While numerous writers recognise the importance of a *habitus* concept for the development of practical theology, to date there is no treatment of the pastoral

[32] Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 7. The translator's preface to this work makes clear that Walther's original term for this disposition is *habitus*, p.xxvi.
[33] Ibid. 7-12.
[34] Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 17-23. This is not to criticise Senkbeil's work, but it does point to the need for further study on the concept of *habitus* and its relation to pastoral theology.

disposition that is both deliberately and consistently integrated within a particular theological context and also firmly rooted in pastoral practice.

## A Way Forward

Questions of how to do pastoral theology, the relation of theology to practice, pastoral theology as doing versus being, the connection of pastoral theology with the minister's own need of personal transformation, and the means and goals of pastoral theology have long been the subject matter of reflective works of pastoral theology. In other words, these questions are nothing new. The church has wrestled with these ideas before, and it should not surprise us that a historical theological analysis of such a concept as the *habitus* idea might provide us with pertinent information for our own processes today. Church history can help us to learn from both the successes and the mistakes of those in the past. To paraphrase Rowan Williams, while it is certainly true that "good theology does not come from bad history," perhaps good historical theology can produce good pastoral theology.[35] Williams summarises the goal of the whole endeavour of church history appropriately:

> Good historical writing, I suggest, is writing that constructs that sense of who we are by a real engagement with the strangeness of the past, that establishes my or our identity now as bound up with the whole range of things that are not easy for me or us, not obvious or native to the world we think we inhabit, yet which have to be recognised in their solid reality as both different from us and part of us. The end product is a sense of who we now are that is subtle enough to encompass the things we don't fully understand. Just as, in a good analysis of an individual self, we emerge with a heightened awareness of the strangeness within, so with history. We are set free from the crippling imprisonment of what we can grasp and take for granted the ultimate trivialising of our identity.[36]

This freedom to consider other ideas and perspectives than our own is especially useful in pastoral theology, where development of the concept of pastoral practice is nearly 2000 years old. Yet various elements of theology are gained and lost over time, and a process of

[35] Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past: The Quest for the Historical Church*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 2. Pete Ward also suggests as much in *Introducing Practical Theology*, 125-127.
[36] Williams, *Why Study the Past,* 23-24.

theological retrieval is often necessary to rediscover what we have forgotten. Williams urges us to remember that we are perhaps not as unique as we would like to think. The arc of theological development is not always towards progress, and evaluating the theology of those who came before can serve as a needed corrective when we realise we may have lost our way. This is not to say that older theology is always better theology; many times it is not. Yet it can ask questions that did not occur to us, and in so doing, drive us deeper into the subject matter than we would have gone left to ourselves.

This project will focus on the development of one aspect of pastoral theology, particularly as it was elaborated in early modern post-reformation England. Pastoral theology was a significant and valued emphasis within reformed theology even as early as the late sixteenth century.[37] Yet,

> It is one of the minor curiosities of church history that, while historians as well as the hagiographers of evangelical nonconformity readily admit that the seventeenth-century puritans were notable for the standards of their pastoral care, relatively little attention has been devoted to this aspect of the puritan movement in recent serious historical writing.[38]

An example of this neglect of pastoral themes and a key figure in this post-reformation context in Britain is John Owen. Owen wrote of the pastoral disposition in both his first and last published works on practical theology. One, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (London, 1643), was written at the beginning of his ministry, before his ecclesiological convictions had been hammered out. The other, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* (London, 1689), was the fruit of decades of pastoral experience and involvement in

[37] See Donald Sinnema, "A Chair in Practical Theology at Leiden University," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* ed by Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma & Jason Zuidema, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 415-442.

[38] David Sceats, "'Precious in the Sight of the Lord...': the theme of death in puritan pastoral theology," *Churchman,* 95/4 1981. From http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/095/Cman_095_4_Sceats.pdf, accessed 19th May, 2020. This analysis is borne out even today when one surveys the subjects addressed in edited works such as *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism, Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* and *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* or the very helpful Oxford Studies in Historical Theology series. Pastoral theology, particularly as developed in an early modern Reformed context, is clearly a neglected topic in academic studies on the period.

the nonconformist project in England. In these works we find two key examples of his thought on the pastoral disposition:

> That for a public, formal, ministerial teaching, two things are required in the teacher:—first, Gifts from God; secondly, Authority from the church (I speak now of ordinary cases). He that wants either is no true pastor. For the first, God sends none upon an employment but whom he fits with gifts for it.[39]

And, "Unto the call of any person unto this office of a pastor in the church there are certain qualifications previously required in him, disposing and making him fit for that office."[40]

But already we find that there are numerous theological, historical, and methodological questions to answer before we can even begin engaging Owen on the pastoral disposition. What does Owen mean by "disposing," and "fit," and "gifts"? What is his pastoral context? How does this project propose to answer these questions in a meaningful and historically-sensitive way? There are twin dangers in historical studies: reading into the documents ideas that are not really there, and missing the importance of the most significant material that is present because of a lack of textual awareness. Church historian Richard Muller has commented on the necessity of being sensitive to the historical record:

> There has been, in other words, a fundamental tendency in theological and philosophical historiography to identify what is important in a past era on the basis of the seeming importance, influence, or relevance of a person, idea, or event to the present-day self-understanding of the writer or the society, *rather than asking the documents of the past era what persons, ideas, or events were then understood as important or influential* – or, indeed, rather than asking the documents themselves what concepts, language, and contexts are requisite to the understanding of the documents![41]

In attempting to understand Owen's practical theology, it will be necessary to explore the context of both Owen's theological understanding and his ministry situation. His confessional

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[39] John Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, in *The Works of John Owen,* ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols; (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-1855); 13.43. In this project I will refer to the title of Owen's individual treatises followed by the volume and page numbers as found in his *Works*. As the final two chapters in this project will explain, in Owen's earlier writings on pastoral theology the *habitus* idea is present only in seed form rather than a fully formed development.

[40] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49.

[41] Richard Muller, "Reflections on Persistent Whiggism and Its Antidotes in the Study of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Intellectual History," in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed by Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 135.

milieu becomes a matter of critical importance for understanding anything he has to say about pastoral ministry. So then, a bit of context would be helpful.

**Reformed Scholasticism and Theoretico-Practical Theology**

Before giving a bit of a biographical introduction to Owen, it would be helpful to look at the larger theological world of which he was a part, and to which I have already alluded, that is, reformed scholasticism. Reformed scholasticism has been described as "more a theological method than a distinct school of theology," with Owen being its "greatest English representative in the era" and "one of the towering theologians of the Calvinist heritage."[42] So what is reformed scholasticism? As the name suggests, it was the appropriation of the medieval scholastic method by the reformed church in the 16th and 17th centuries. Reformed scholasticism was neither only a philosophical method nor merely theological analysis, but was rather a philosophical method for engaging in the tasks of developing theology.[43] Richard Muller's definition provides a useful starting place: "The denominator 'Reformed scholastic' refers to a writer or a document belonging, confessionally, to the Reformed as distinct from the Lutheran wing of the magisterial Reformation, and characterized by the use of an academic or scholastic method."[44] Muller explains that scholasticism uses much of, though

[42] Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

[43] For more on the distinctions between theology and philosophy in the middle ages, or rather, the lack thereof, and the difficulty in accurately analysing that distinction ourselves when we examine works from that period, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10-16.

[44] Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* 4 vols, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1.30. Muller continues: "That method, par excellence, is evident in the academic disputations of the era and belongs to the context of the early modern academy or university – a context that could just as easily be called Reformation, post-Reformation, or late Renaissance, depending on one's vantage point. By extension, the term can be applied generally to the more technical theological or dogmatic writings of the era – and its application implies the early modern context of debate. In other words, the use of 'scholastic' and related terms with reference to the writers of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras assumes an academic context influenced by both the Renaissance and the Reformation, a context not at all identical with that of medieval scholasticism. Similarly, 'Reformed orthodox,' used with reference to the same writers or documents, indicates an individual or a theology that stands within the confessional framework of the Reformed churches and which is understood as conveying the 'right teaching' of those churches, whether scholastic, catechetical, exegetical, or homiletical, as determined by the standards of the era. 'Orthodoxy,' in other words, functions as a historical denominator – and reference to the era of orthodoxy indicates the term of the institutionalization of the Reformation according

not all, the method of medieval philosophy without necessarily importing all of its content into the project of theological development.

> In this theologically and philosophically broad but methodologically closely defined sense, the term "scholasticism" can be applied to a theology that is not a duplication of medieval scholastic teaching and method, that is distinctly Protestant, and that is not nearly as concerned to draw philosophy into dialogue with theology as the great synthetic words of the thirteenth century. Scholasticism, then, indicates the technical and logical approach to theology as a discipline characteristic of theological system from the late twelfth through the seventeenth century. Since scholasticism is primarily a method or approach to academic disciplines, it is not necessarily allied to any particular philosophical perspective, nor does it represent a systematic attachment to or concentration upon any particular doctrine or concept as a key to theological system. This latter point has always been clear with respect to medieval scholasticism, but it needs to be made just as decisively with regard to Protestant scholasticism.[45]

Robert Pasnau's summary of scholasticism and warning about oversimplification in analysis regarding it is helpful.

> We can speak in general of the *scholastics*, referring to those philosophers from the thirteenth century well into the seventeenth (and beyond) who taught philosophy and theology in a university setting, in accord with a common Aristotelian method, vocabulary, and set of assumptions. It will very quickly become apparent as we proceed, however, that scholastic philosophers agree among themselves no more than does any group of philosophers from any historical period. The superficial similarities of style and vocabulary conceal enormous differences of doctrine, just as great as those that divide philosophers today.[46]

It is especially important to consider this point, as an accurate interpretation of Owen's context depends on being sensitive to the complexities and nuances of theological and philosophical debate in Owen's time. Previous understandings of Reformation and post-Reformation theology neglected this emphasis to their own detriment.

> The theology, or more precisely, the theologies that arose in Reformed circles during that time were diverse and variegated, with differences arising out of local issues and controversies, church-political concerns in various states and principalities, varied receptions of the older theological and philosophical traditions, differing appropriations and rejections of the newer philosophical approaches of the era, and

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to its confessional norms, namely the era extending roughly from the latter part of the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries." In *PRRD* 1.30.

[45] Muller, *PRRD*, 1.36-37. For more on the recent history of the renaissance of interest in reformed scholasticism, see Maarten Wisse and Marcel Sarot, "Introduction: Reforming Views of Reformed Scholasticism," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt,* ed by Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1-27.

[46] Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274-1671,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 2.

> specific curricular concerns in the academies and universities. Simply making this point sets aside the old dogmatic narratives that interpreted the development of Reformed orthodoxy as a monolithic movement toward a scholastic predeterminarianism; or alternatively, toward a form of dogmatic legalism – and in either case, at odds with the evangelical message of the Reformers. The scholarship of the last several decades has convincingly set aside these older dogmatic models, not only by examining the work of individual thinkers in the diverse contexts just noted, but also by identifying patterns of Reformed appropriation of the earlier intellectual traditions, whether patristic or medieval, in particular by examining more closely the late medieval roots of the Reformation.[47]

Why is locating Owen within his context of Reformed scholasticism so important for this project? For one, it helps us understand the innately practical focus that developed as a key part of the task of theology. Theory and practice were significantly interrelated and even unified concerns in reformed scholastic developments of theology. William Ames was one of the fathers of Puritan theology, a theology which flourished in the soil of reformed scholasticism. His "definition of theology as not only 'speaking of God' but also 'living to God' pinned intellect and devotion together in a way characteristic of the puritan ethos."[48] Similarly, a Dutch contemporary of Owen, Wilhelmus á Brakel described the theological task

[47] Richard Muller, "Reformed Theology Between 1600 and 1800," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800,* ed by Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A. G. Roeber, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 167. See Dolf te Velde for a brief summary of reformed scholasticism, "Reformed theology and scholasticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed by Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 213-229. Of particular importance is his following observation. "In nineteenth- and twentieth-century research, the theology of the Reformed scholastics was often understood as a unified system construed on the basis of a 'central' dogma.' The idea of a 'system,' however, is foreign to scholastic methodology. While Reformed scholastics did assume an inner coherence to the doctrine taught in Scripture and did attempt to elucidate this coherence in their theology, their presentation of doctrine hardly ever takes the shape of an 'axiomatic system' derived from one or more basic principles. The method of 'commonplaces' applied by most professors of systematic theology originated in the practice of biblical exegesis. The running exposition of Scripture was often interrupted to discuss a doctrinal, ethical, or practical issue emerging from the passage under study. In the transitional phase from the Reformation to scholasticism such 'commonplaces' functioned as an excursus, but they were soon assembled in a more or less coherent topical sequence. An important model was the *Loci communes* of Melanchthon which displayed a historical sequence derived from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans and was largely followed by, among others, Calvin in his *Institutes*. Broadly speaking, a similar sequences of topics is followed by most Reformed scholastic handbooks: starting with a preliminary chapter on 'theology', the doctrine of Scripture is expounded as theology's 'cognitive foundation', followed by the doctrine of God and of the Trinity as the 'essential foundation'; next, the divine decrees and works of creation, providence and salvation are discussed; then the various elements of Christology and soteriology, including the church and the sacraments as means of grace, receive separate attention; finally the closing chapters often deal with the task of government in the present age, the final judgment of Christ and eternal life. While the fundamental notions are deployed in the first set of loci, each topic contains its own discourse, concepts and arguments. The fact that the doctrinal topics are interconnected does not imply that they are considered from a single point of view." p 227.

[48] Susan Hardman Moore, "Reformed theology and puritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed by Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 199.

this way: "Religion consists of four matters: 1) its foundation or basis, 2) its form or essence, 3) its regulative principle, and 4) its practical manifestation."[49] Of such importance was putting theology into practice Owen and his contemporaries considered it to be a part of the very centre of religion.

> Fourthly, the essence of religion consists in an active agreement with, and execution of the will of God. All that God wills, the servant of God also wills, because the will of God is the object of his desire and delight. He rejoices that God desires something from him and that God reveals to him what He wishes to have done. This motivates him to perform it whole-heartedly as the Lord's will. "Doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph.6:6).[50]

Development of theology was seen as an inherently practical task in the context of Reformed scholasticism, for it is only as believers consider who God is that they see what they are called to do as well.

Here we again find ourselves in the midst of a question that consumed both medieval and Reformed scholastic theology: is theology theoretical, practical, or both?[51] For Owen, as well as for Francis Turretin, Owen's contemporary in Geneva, theology is both theoretical and practical, with a particular prominence on the practical side.[52] But this discussion was not

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[49] Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* tr by Bartel Elshout, ed by Joel R. Beeke, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 1.3.

[50] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 1.4.

[51] Lest the matter be seen as a question of purely academic debate for medieval theologians, Muller points out that the "tradition of piety and mysticism" was also involved in this discussion. See Muller, *PRRD,* 1.340. Though even at this point we must guard against misunderstanding. "The adjectives *theoretical* and *practical*, like the nouns from which they derive, *theoria* and *praxis*, *do not* indicate a tendency toward metaphysical rationalization on the one hand and pragmatic enterprise on the other, or a statement of abstract principle on the one hand and of application on the other. To the extend that the scholastic enterprise is interpreted in terms of such a view of *theoria* and *praxis*, it is misinterpreted. The scholastics, both of the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, understood both words in their basic etymological sense: *theoria* (from the Greek verb *theorein*, 'to look at') indicates something seen or beheld; *praxis* (from the Greek verb, *prassein*, 'to do') indicates something done or engaged in with an end in view. *Theoria,* then, is synonymous with *contemplatio* or *speculatio* and indicates the pure beholding of something. To the scholastic mind, this concept of a pure beholding, with no end in view other than the vision of the thing beheld, must be understood in terms of the *visio Dei* and the ultimate enjoyment of God (*fruitio Dei*) by man. *Praxis*, by contrast refers to an activity that leads toward an end: theology is understood as practical when it is seen primarily as leading to a goal beyond itself, namely salvation, and is designed therefore to conduce to a righteous life and the love of God." *PRRD*, 1.340-341.

[52] See Muller, *PRRD*, 1.343-352. Turretin believed that "the question is necessary not only for the understanding of the true nature of theology, but also on account of the controversies of this time." *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 1.7.2. Owen was aware of this discussion and was in agreement with the substance of the position elaborated by Turretin. See Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 104-107.

limited to theology as an academic affair.[53] It also had a significant impact on the church as well. "The basic definition of theology as both theoretical and practical led to a balance of doctrine and 'use' or application in seventeenth-century sermons. Indeed scholastic attention to form almost invariably assured the presence of exegetical study, exposition, doctrinal statement, and application in the Reformed orthodox sermon."[54] Thus came about the designation of theoretico (or theoretical) -practical theology. Turretin again,

> Theology is so far theoretical-practical in that it cannot be called merely practical, but also theoretical, as the knowledge of mysteries is an essential part of it…. Nevertheless, that theology is more practical than speculative is evident from the ultimate end, which is practice. For although all mysteries are not regulative of operation, they are impulsive to operation. For there is none so theoretical (*theōrēton*) and removed from practice that it does not incite to the love and worship of God. Nor is any theory saving which does not lead to practice.[55]

Theology leads to practice, and practice is derived from theology, for "theology for the Reformed was both theoretical and practical, both intellectual and voluntary, with an emphasis on the practical or voluntary element…. This instrumental function of religion and theology underlines their primarily practical character."[56]

So we have seen that the theological development of the Reformed scholastics, of whom Owen was a key figure, was deliberately practical and inherently concerned with the appropriate and resultant action to any theological project. It was self-consciously connected with its confessional context, but that fact did not make it pastorally barren. On the contrary, it was because they were so concerned with rigorous theology that the Reformed scholastics deliberately connected their confessional theology with daily practice.

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[53] Owen and the Reformed scholastics, however, would not have recognised a sharp distinction between academic theology and church theology.
[54] Muller, *PRRD*, 1.218. Muller lists Owen as one of the prime examples of the "early orthodox homiletical pattern" that had this dual emphasis on both the theoretical and practical aspects to theology.
[55] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.7.14-15.
[56] Muller, *PRRD*, 1.354.

**Intro to Owen**

With such a background in view, who was John Owen? Owen was the son of a clergyman who was nonconformist in his theology but practically had to conform to practices with which he did not agree in order to be a part of the religious establishment.[57] He was educated at Oxford under Thomas Barlow, a noted scholar with a substantial basis in the scholastic method of theology, focusing particularly on Thomas Aquinas. After having finished his MA and having just been ordained as a priest, Owen left Oxford for, after a series of short employments, London. Owen himself later reflects that he was hoping at this time to make a name for himself. Eventually he did, but in perhaps rather different circumstances than he would have originally chosen. Relatively early in his education he chose to support the parliamentary side in the brewing political turmoil that would lead to the English Civil Wars. This decision would have profound consequences throughout Owen's life. Owen's career began busily enough, for he published his first book, took his first parish, and married his first wife, all within a few months of each other. The publication of his book, *A Display of Arminianism*, brought Owen's name before parliament, and he was given the opportunity to preach before parliament numerous times over the next years. This led to him accompanying Oliver Cromwell on his military expeditions to Ireland and Scotland, and eventually resulted in an appointment as the dean of Christ Church and later the vice-chancellor of Oxford University.

As Owen's fate was frequently tied to that of the larger Independent project, with the downfall of the Commonwealth after Cromwell's death, Owen retreated for a time into obscurity, with his movements and employments being rather difficult to track. This time was not wasted, as Owen published numerous volumes of both theology and exegesis while out of

[57] In this section I rely upon material from Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Richard Muller, *After Calvin,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003); Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse,* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002); and Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*, (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971).

the public eye. By the late 1660s Owen had been established as a leader among the congregational churches in and around London. His employment after his involvement with Oxford was usually in chaplaincy or pastorally related work, and he eventually took a small congregation in what is now the centre of the financial district in London but was at the time a rather squalid corner of the city. He remained in his work as pastor of a congregation and advisor to the congregational churches until his death in 1683. His place among nonconformist divines is noted by his funeral at Bunhill Fields. His published works run in excess of 26 published volumes, with several more collections of his sermons existing in manuscript form.

A practical focus to any branch of theology, exploring the whole of theology so that it could be made serviceable to its adherents in the church rather than only in the academic guild, was a core component of mid 17th century reformed scholasticism and the pastoral training of the English Puritans. John Owen was no exception to this emphasis. A skilled exegete, he wrote a massive commentary on the book of Hebrews that was significantly valued within his theological tradition long after his death. The English Parliament called upon him several times to write against authors they deemed unorthodox, and Owen dutifully fulfilled his task in polemical theology. He was instrumental in defending the cause of nonconformity against such figures as the dean of St. Pauls Cathedral. He wrote a number of volumes on various theological topics as well as works of devotional theology. It is this latter set of writings for which Owen is most well known today.

Church Historian Richard Muller has argued that reading Owen's devotional works without also considering his theological writings is to miss his broader context.[58] One cannot rightly understand Owen without also understanding something of reformed scholasticism and the broader theological project of the early modern protestant writers. Picking individual

[58] Muller, *After Calvin*, 192-193.

bits of his theology without understanding the larger perspective from which he was writing skews one's understanding of his views. I would like to argue that reading any of Owen's works, his theological writings, his polemical theology, or his devotional writings, without considering his pastoral context, the immediate situation in which he lived the majority of his life, is to similarly neglect one of the primary emphases of his work. To interpret Owen's theology outside the concerns of the pastoral responsibilities that he cherished and kept going back to misses something vital to what drove the man to write what and how he did. If it was not *the* central emphasis of his life, then the practical application of theology to the roles and responsibilities of the pastoral office was *one* of the key defining features of his life's work.

It is this especially pastoral emphasis of Owen's theology that has been largely missed in recent studies of Owen's life and legacy. Theological studies of Owen's works focus on his elaboration of atonement or union with God.[59] Much attention has been paid to Owen as a key proponent of the reformed scholastic method of theology.[60] Numerous studies have been done on his sermons or elements of his broader theology, with particular attention to what Richard Muller has called his more "devotional theology".[61] Several biographical accounts have been written of his life or of portions of his life.[62] He has been the subject of several works that focus especially on his development of reformed theology and his place in English Puritanism.[63] Yet to date there has been no sustained study or evaluation of Owen's practical

[59] See Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen the Coherence of Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Edwin Tay, "Christ's Priestly Oblation and Intercession Their Development and Significance in John Owen," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), and Kelly Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).
[60] See Carl Trueman, *Claims of Truth* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), and *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002).
[61] Muller, *After Calvin*, 192-193. See Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed by Robert Oliver (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002); Matthew Barret and Michael Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, (Wheaton, Il.: Crossway, 2015); Kelly Kapic, *Communion with God*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007).
[62] See Toon, *God's Statesman*; Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent John Owen, 1616-1683," unpublished PhD dissertation, (Harvard University, 1972); Gribben, *John Owen.*
[63] See Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)*; The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen*, ed Kelly M.

theology and pastoral practise. Even in the works which focus on the development of Congregationalist theology there has been a strange neglect of the larger pastoral context in which that theology was being put into practise. The analysis of Owen has focused largely on his place in reformed scholasticism rather than on his actual application of the ideals he attempted to develop through his reformed scholasticism. Through this project I hope to contribute something that will reignite interest in how Owen himself attempted to put his beliefs into action in the midst of a rather unexceptional congregation in a very difficult time. Perhaps in so doing, we will begin to see the man behind the theology.

**Theological Context of Owen on *Habitus***

Owen explores the concept of *habitus* most fully in his treatise on the Holy Spirit. This *Pneumatologia* is one of Owen's most significant contributions to reformed orthodoxy, and in it he points to the Holy Spirit as the divine agent principally responsible for the work of dispositions.[64] One noteworthy comment in his lengthy but rather standard preface to the volume shows that he sees himself as doing pioneering work in his *Pneumatologia*. "I know not any who ever went before me in this design of representing the whole economy of the Holy Spirit, with all his adjuncts, operations, and effects…I had not therein the advantage of

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Kapic and Mark Jones, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Tim Cooper's *John Owen and Richard Baxter and the Formulation of Nonconformity* (London: Routledge, 2016); *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* ed Willem Van Vlastuin and Kelly M. Kapic, (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[64] Owen published the first volume of his *Pneumatologia* in 1674, shortly after he had taken his final pastoral position at a congregation near Leadenhall Street in London. Despite his congregational membership quadrupling from his previous work in this new pastorate, and notwithstanding his continued position of leadership within the larger congregational network of churches, he issued the first parts of second volume of this work several years later, *The Reason of Faith* in 1677 and *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word* in 1678, demonstrating the importance with which Owen viewed this subject and its explanation. Another portion of the work, *A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, was published in 1682, and the remainder of the volume, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, was published posthumously in 1693. Owen himself explains that he intends for these later published treatments to be read as a part of the larger whole of *Pneumatologia* in *Works*, 4.6, 120, 355. Owen gives an outline of the topics he wanted to address and later would address in the whole of this work in his preface to the first volume of *Pneumatologia*, further demonstrating that all the discourse of these two volumes are to be seen as one continuous whole. See *Works*, 3.10. Owen seems generally unable to write succinct treatments of theology, and this work, reaching over 1500 pages across the five separate printings of its original editions, is certainly no exception. Next to Owen's massive commentary on Hebrews, *Pneumatologia* is his largest and most developed work.

any one ancient or modern author to beat out the paths of truth before me."[65] This is a very bold claim, but one that his subsequent publications on the subject bear out. Owen's particular contribution to the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not so much that he says anything radically new on the work of the Spirit, but instead that he collates virtually every topic that would have been included dealing with the Spirit's work in Reformed Orthodox thought into one cohesive and systematic treatment.[66] The uniqueness of *Pneumatologia* is its conceptual expansiveness.[67]

Throughout *Pneumatologia,* Owen deals with proofs of the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, his involvement in the original creation, the Spirit's role in Old Testament prophecy, his preparation of Christ's physical body and his work in Christ's human nature in the incarnation, the process of regeneration and the divine role in conversion, the Spirit's regular work in the sanctification of believers, helps for believers in meditating on God, the necessity of the Spirit's work in the human mind, his work in aiding believers in their understanding of scripture, the Spirit's involvement in believers' prayer, and the ways the Spirit comforts and gives gifts to believers. The length of these volumes was of no concern to

[65] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.7. Owen is not saying he is the first to ever write on the work of the Holy Spirit, as he shortly thereafter comments on his reliance on "what was taught and believed in the ancient church" providing input for him. He elsewhere comments that he has "the plain testimonies of the Scripture, the suffrage of the ancient church, and the experience of them who do sincerely believe, to rest upon." *Pneumatologia*, 3.10.
[66] "All these things, many whereof are handled by others separately and apart, are here proposed in their order with respect unto their proper end and design." Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.7.
[67] The distinctiveness of this work is demonstrated in Richard Muller's examination of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in reformed orthodoxy. Of the many reformed authors that Muller looks at, Owen is one of only two whose treatments published specifically on the work of the Holy Spirit are considered as representative. Owen's contemporary Thomas Goodwin was the other, but his treatment is a third the size of Owen's and is significantly condensed in comparison. Whereas Owen attempts to deal with all of the Holy Spirit's works as revealed in scripture, Goodwin's treatment is primarily focused on the work of regeneration. See Muller, *PRRD,* 4.333-381; also Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 420-441. In Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae,* to use a medieval scholastic example, there is relatively little devoted specifically to the work of the Holy Spirit outside of Aquinas' questions on the person of the Holy Spirit (*ST* 1a QQ.36-38) and the gifts of the Spirit (*ST* 1a2ae QQ.68-70). William Ames' emphasis in his *Medulla Theologiae* (1623) is similar to that of Aquinas. Nor do Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (1679) or Wilhelmus a Brakel's *De Redelijke Godsdienst* (1700), significant works by two of Owen's contemporaries on the continent, deal extensively with the doctrine of the Spirit outside of the usual defences of the trinity, though in many separate doctrinal themes they address similar questions on the Holy Spirit to Owen. This is not to say that these other contemporary writers do not address the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; only that Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's work is decidedly more pronounced and expansive in comparison with theirs.

Owen.[68] His goal for this work was that it deal comprehensively with every work of the Spirit, especially as it relates to the conversion, sanctification, and edification of God's people.

If Owen has a specific contribution to the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit on the concept of dispositions, this is it: Owen places a distinct emphasises on the Spirit's role in giving dispositions to believers. Though there is also a trinitarian focus to the concept of disposition, his focus in *Pneumatologia* is pre-eminently on the work of the Holy Spirit.[69] This is an area of Owen's development of the concept of dispositions is noteworthy. Whereas other Christian writers, such as Aquinas and Ames, also wrote about dispositions and were clear that these dispositions come from God, the Holy Spirit's role was either a passing reference or something that the specifics of which were clarified later.[70] Owen clearly emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit when he deals with the dispositions and their related concepts.

Owen also emphasises that the Spirit begins the process of dispositional change in believers. Dispositions result in real change in the triad of human nature, mind, will and affections, and though there is real spiritual influence in the body as well, these dispositions

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[68] "Hence, it may be, some will judge that our discourses on these subjects are drawn out into a greater length than was needful or convenient, by that continual intermixture of practical applications which runs along in them all. But if they shall be pleased to consider that my design was, not to handle these things in a way of controversy, but, declaring and confirming the truth concerning them, to accommodate the doctrines treated of unto practice, and that I dare not treat of things of this nature in any other way but such as may promote the edification of the generality of believers, they will either be of my mind, or, it may be, without much difficulty admit of my excuse." Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.9

[69] Owen does show how all three persons of the God are involved in the giving and sustaining of ongoing grace provided through the infused disposition. The Father is involved as being the ultimate source of all grace. "This renovation and sanctification by the Holy Ghost, and all supplies of actual grace, enabling us unto obedience, are everywhere asserted as the grant and work of the Father, 'who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.'" *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,* ed. William H. Goold, 7 vols. 1854-1855; (republished, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991-2010), 3.381 (I am using the displayed volume numbers from the Banner of Truth edition to reference Owen's *Hebrews* comments). The Son is involved as the member of the Godhead to whom believers are united. "This is that whereby we have union with Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Originally and efficiently the Holy Spirit dwelling in him and us is the cause of this union; but formally this new principle of grace is so." *Pneumatologia,* 3.478. This disposition ensures that believers remain united to Christ throughout their lives. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each an integral part of this new disposition in believers.

[70] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae Q.51.4, Q.62, Q.68.2; and William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (1642), 124-129, 197-214.

must have their source from outside human nature.[71] The Holy Spirit is the one who puts this disposition into believers. This empowerment through the infused disposition can only come from the work of the Holy Spirit, and without it the believer has no ability to do "any one act that is spiritually good."[72] Through the work of this disposition, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to "engage the immediate power and efficacy of such glorious causes and means."[73] This is what makes the Christian both capable of and suited to living before God. The Holy Spirit is doing far more than simply providing the opportunity for holiness in Christians; he is both providing everything that is necessary for this work and actually accomplishing this work in them. He does so by graciously using the infused disposition to shape the believer's thoughts, desires, and actions according to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. A focus on the disposition as a work of God's grace through the power of the Spirit is intended to result in believers holding the Spirit's work in high esteem in their lives, in believers demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit's work through their lives, and being filled with gratitude for what the Spirit has done in them.[74]

The concept of disposition continually leads back to God in Owen's theology. The new disposition must be a work of the Holy Spirit, as natural (i.e. fallen) humanity has no ability to work towards the sort of disposition that the Holy Spirit imparts. Owen's development of the topics of virtue, character, and sanctification always leads back to God. God is the source of all these things, and it is only through God's enablement that believers may develop any of these things. But in keeping with Owen's views on theoretical-practical theology, a right understanding of God's work through the Holy Spirit is also intended to

[71] For the connection of the body with the image of God in Owen's theology see Kapic, *Communion with God*, 56-57.
[72] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.477.
[73] Ibid. 481.
[74] Ibid. 482.

result in genuine faith that leads to right action on the part of believers as well.[75] Right doctrine leads to right living. Owen acknowledges the apparent contradiction between emphasising the primary nature of the Spirit's work in believers and still keeping a right focus on believers' responsibility towards God, especially as he makes such an emphasis of sanctification his *Pneumatologia*.[76] Yet exploring the work of the Spirit is key for believers to be able to understand how they can relate to God.[77] Rightly understanding the concept of disposition as a gift of God brings believers back to the necessity of learning about the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Owen's focus particularly on the work of the Holy Spirit in the giving of a new disposition to believers is a key emphasis in *Pneumatologia*. The Spirit is the person of the Godhead who is the distinct source of dispositions, and examining the concept of disposition, in Owen's theology, leads continually back to God. Believers undergo a process of dispositional change in their lives because of the Spirit's work. But what is the process by which believers are given this new disposition? Owen describes the Spirit's work of regeneration as the means by which believers are given a new disposition. This emphasis is significantly related to Owen's development of the doctrine of sanctification, and disposition plays an important role in how Owen urges Christians to think about and pursue their own sanctification.

[75] "Moreover, what is discoursed on these things is suited unto the edification of them that do believe, and directed unto their furtherance in true spiritual obedience and holiness, or the obedience of faith." Ibid. 9.
[76] "I shall add no more on this head but that, whereas the only inconvenience where with our doctrine is pressed is the pretended difficulty in reconciling the nature and necessity of our duty with the efficacy of the grace of the Spirit, I have been so far from waiving the consideration of it, as that I have embraced every opportunity to examine it in all particular instances wherein it may be urged with most appearance of probability… . The command of God is the measure and rule of our industry and diligence in a way of duty; and why any one should be discouraged from the exercise of that industry which God requires of him by the consideration of the aid and assistance which he hath promised unto him, I cannot understand. The work of obedience is difficult and of the highest importance." Ibid. 10.
[77] "Take away the dispensation of the Spirit, and his effectual operations in all the intercourse that is between God and man…and Christianity is plucked up by the roots." Ibid. 8.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the need for a theological integrated and confessionally grounded *habitus* model for pastoral theology and a well-rounded understanding of character formation in the life of a pastor. Such a concept has been neglected in both contemporary practical theology and historical theological studies. Evaluating the concept of the pastoral disposition in the thought of the 17th century reformed pastor John Owen offers the chance to peer inside the ministerial mind of one who was thoroughly steeped in the reformed scholastic and theoretico-practical tradition of post-reformation Protestantism. Now it is time to gain a more significant understanding of this *habitus* concept and its place in the history of theology.

## Chapter 2 - What is a *Habitus*?

A key concept for understanding Owen's practical theology, and a good example of how Owen borrows from the tradition of Thomas Aquinas' writings is the idea of *habitus*. *Habitus* describes an aspect of a person's character or personality that provides direction and impetus for a movement towards an action.[1] It is a type of inclination towards something. One could describe a *habitus* simply as a "learned capacity" or that which is "halfway between a capacity and an action, between pure potentiality and full actuality."[2]

### The Idea of *Habitus*

One could liken *habitus* to the mindset a child gains in learning to ride a bicycle. Anyone who has learned to ride a bicycle or has taught someone else to ride a bicycle has seen the moment the child goes from being terrified of being on two wheels to enjoying the thrill of movement under one's own power. Previously the child falls over almost instantly as soon as the guiding hands are removed or their absence is observed. Balance is nearly impossible. Both the ability and inclination are lacking. Then something changes. The child gains a certain confidence, even if not perfect adeptness. Suddenly the lack of guiding and protecting hands is no longer a concern. The possibility and actuality of falling are no longer as troubling as they were minutes before.

What has happened? The child has acquired a new *habitus*, a change in the inclination, that enables him or her to ride the bicycle, or at the very least, to desire to ride the

[1] This examination of *habitus* focuses on *habitus* as they are in the soul rather than the natural body. There are of course natural *habitus* to objects. Aristotle describes the sort of *habitus* a stone has for falling once it has been thrown and Aquinas refers to natural *habitus* of the body. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book II.1; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.50.1. As Aquinas points out, the sort of *habitus* we are examining here deals not with "actions of the body which are from nature" but "actions which proceed from the soul, and the principle of which is the will." *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.50.1.

[2] Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 150. Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 84.

bicycle.[3] The child has moved beyond mere "capacity" and even past simple "potentiality," but has not yet reached "full actuality." The *habitus* is this middle state in which riding the bicycle becomes possible, yet the *habitus* is not the same as actually riding a bicycle. The *habitus* is what makes it "easier" to accomplish the task. It enables the act. The *habitus* imparts the inclination so that the latent ability now has power. It does not ingrain the pattern in action (a habit), but it does provide a sort of personal bent toward that action.[4]

A *habitus* is what is necessary for a person to develop the ability to make a task or mindset habitual. One Thomas scholar gives a particularly useful explanation.

> In other places, Aquinas, followed by later scholastics, codified the different kinds of actuality and potentiality. A human baby, not yet having learned language, is in a state of remote potentiality with regard to the use of language: he has a capacity for language learning which animals lack, but he is not yet able to use language as an adult can. An adult who has learned English, even if he is not at this moment speaking English, is in a state of actuality in comparison with the child's potentiality: this was called 'first actuality' (*S* 1,79,10). But a state of first actuality is still itself a potentiality: the knowledge of English is the ability to speak English and understand it when spoken to. This first actuality can be called a *habitus* or disposition; it is something halfway between potentiality and full-blooded actuality (*S* 1,79,6 *ad* 3). The latter, the 'second actuality', is the actual speaking or understanding of English: particular activities and events which are exercises of the ability which is the first actuality (*S* 1,79,10).[5]

This *habitus* is neither that capacity for nor the actual exercise of an ability. Rather it is something in between. It is not the ability itself, but it is what gives motion towards the ability; it sets the will for that ability into motion and results in the ability being put into action. The *habitus,* or we could say "disposition," does not accomplish the task for the person, but without the disposition that task will be considerably more difficult. The disposition is necessary as a starting point towards accomplishing the task. John Oesterle

[3] As will be made clear in the next section, while there is a key distinction between acquired and infused dispositions, the essential concept of what a disposition is remains the same whether it refers to a infused disposition or an acquired disposition.
[4] Pasnau points out that *habitus* go further than merely giving influence. "Ideally, dispositions [*habitus*] perfect the capacities they inform; indeed, Aquinas simply defines a virtue as the perfection of a capacity (1a2ae 55.1c). Without dispositions, many kinds of action would be impossible." In *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* 150.
[5] Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind,* (London: Routledge, 1993), 53.

provides some further context (though he rather unhelpfully uses "habit" as a transliteration of *habitus*):

> The first thing to note about habit, therefore, is that it is a mean between power and act, that is, it is the modification of a power to act in a certain way. If we were to try to define *habit* and were looking for the genus of habit, we would discover that *disposition* is the genus of habit. Any habit, then, is a disposition of a power to act in a certain way. Stated more fully, a habit is a firm or steady disposition of a power to act regularly in a certain way.[6]

A disposition is what enables us to act in a particular manner. It is what takes us from mere ability; it provides power so that action is possible.

Now part of the confusion that can occur does so because the idea of habit in present day English is not a direct translation from *habitus* to habit, though many do use it in that way.[7] Kenny points out that "Dispositions are not the same as habits (though all habits are dispositions)."[8] The way we use habit today has more to do with an ingrained pattern of action, much closer to "full actuality" or a repetitive "second actuality" than "potentiality," than it does to a personal inclination towards something. We might say, "smoking is a bad

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[6] John Oesterle, *Ethics: The introduction to moral science,* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1957), 55.

[7] See the chapter by Nicolas Faucher and Magali Roques, "The Many Virtues of Second Nature: Habitus in Latin Medieval Philosophy," in *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits (Habitus) in Medieval Philosophy,* ed by Nicolas Faucher and Magali Roques, (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018) 1-23, for more on the tradition of translation for the *habitus* concept.

[8] Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind,* 85. I am immensely grateful to Sebastian Rehnman for his help on this idea and for pointing me to Kenny and the English understanding of this concept. See Anthony Kenny, "Introduction." in *Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 22 (1a2ae. 49-54): Dispositions for Human Acts,* ed Anthony Kenny, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 1964), xix-xxxiv. "The translation 'habit' lies ready to hand, and one can see how somebody might call a habit a source of action. But it is never safe to assume that a transliteration of a word is an accurate translation of it. A word borrowed from one language into another acquires a history independent of its meaning in the parent tongue. The assumption is particularly dangerous in the case of the English transliteration of words used by the *Summa*. For not only have the English words come to us after centuries of independent history, they entered the language from Latin at a date when their philosophical usage had been influenced by theories explicitly opposed to St Thomas's own. We must be wary of assuming, for instance, that '*actio*' means *action*, or that '*causa*' means *cause*, or that '*objectum*' means *object*. In particular, we shall see that very few, if any habits are *habitus*… There is only one safe method of finding an English equivalent for a technical expression of philosophical Latin. It is to list the concrete examples to which the expression is applies and to discover which, if any, English philosophical term covers the same range… [T]here is an English term whose philosophical use corresponds very closely to '*habitus*' as used by St Thomas: namely, 'disposition'… So the states of mind and soul which St Thomas calls '*habitus*' will henceforth be referred to by the English word 'disposition', while the Latin word '*dispositio*', on the other hand, which St Thomas uses as a technical term to contrast with '*habitus*', will be rendered 'state': its meaning will be clear enough in the context in which it occurs" xx-xxi.

habit" or "waking at 6.00 in the morning is a good habit." This is not the classical sense of *habitus*.[9] Kenny's distinction is helpful:

> The difference between disposition and habit might be roughly characterised thus. If one has a *habitus* to *φ* then it is easier to *φ* than if one has not: examples are *being generous* and *speaking French* (cf *De virtutibus* 1, ad 13). If one has a habit of *φ*-ing, then it is harder not to *φ* than if one has not: examples are *smoking* and saying '*I say!*' before each sentence.[10]

"Habit," as used today, refers to habituated action rather than inclination. *Habitus,* or "disposition," refers to an inward movement towards something. A habit makes it difficult *to avoid* doing something. A disposition enables one *to do* something. Perhaps an explanation from Aquinas himself would be helpful.

> '*Habitus*', the Latin word for 'disposition,' does indeed come from the verb '*habere.*' But it has two different senses corresponding to two uses of the verb from which it is derived. '*Habere*' means *to have,* in the sense in which a human being, or anything else, *has* or *possesses* something; but '*se habere*' means *to be in a certain state,* whether absolutely or relatively… *A disposition,* says Aristotle, *is a state which is either a good state or bad state for its possessor either absolutely or relatively: health is a disposition of this kind*. It is dispositions, so defined, which are our present concern.[11]

Thus a disposition is a state which causes someone to possess something such as an ability or an inclination. Kenny shows the importance of this topic and how Aquinas is especially relevant.

> Once the distinction has been made [between *habitus* and habits], it is obvious that *habitus* are a far more important topic of inquiry than habits. The concept of disposition is an essential element in the characterization of peculiarly human behaviour and experience, even though great philosophers have sometimes seemed almost unaware of this fact. St Thomas has the merit of having grasped the importance of the concept and of having been the first great philosopher to attempt a full-scale analysis of it.[12]

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[9] Oesterle provides insightful comment here: "Since virtue is a principle of operation in us, and since virtue is neither a passion nor a power, it can only be the one other principle of operation in us, namely *habit.* The word 'habit,' unfortunately, has lost some of the vigor of its original meaning. To most persons, 'habit' suggests a more or less mechanical manner of operation arising from a mechanical repetition of acts. At best, such a meaning of 'habit' indicates only one of its aspects – a decidedly lesser aspect." In *Ethics,* 55.
[10] Kenny, "Introduction." in *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 22,* xxx.
[11] Aquinas, *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 22,* 1a2ae, Q.49.1.
[12] Kenny, "Introduction." in *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 22.* xxx-xxxi.

The idea of *habitus* or "disposition" describes a specific but often neglected part of how human beings function. This aspect is indispensable if we are discussing the faculties responsible for desire and behaviour.

As is often the case with technical terms taken from another language, it is evident there is no direct translation from *habitus* into English. Any of the English terms we might choose vary in their level of accuracy. Several parallel ideas in English may involve other connotations that lead us somewhat farther away from the original idea. But in order to identify a conceptual cluster of ideas that relate to *habitus* in English, it is necessary to find a close approximation in English.[13] When both John Owen and modern writers use "habit" as an English translation of the Latin concept of *habitus*, they often do so with habit or habitual having the meaning of *habitus* or "disposition" rather than its present day sense of ingrained pattern of action.[14] For the purposes of this project and for the sake of clarity, I will be using "disposition" as the main term for the idea of *habitus*, with ability, capacity, habit, habitual, and inclination as terms which may and probably do point to a dispositional concept.[15] These

[13] Jean Porter comments on the difficulty of translating *habitus* into English. "The translation of *habitus* as 'habit,' while common, is misleading, because the English word implies mindless or stereotypical behavior, whereas for Aquinas a true virtue is precisely not mindless. On the contrary, it is a disposition formed through, and continually informed by, rational reflection. Nor would it be quite accurate to translate the term as 'disposition,' since a *habitus* is only one example of such." In "Virtues and Vices," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 273.

[14] Whether or not it is technically correct to do so, this is how many today use these words. While it may be imprecise for me to do so, I cannot avoid referencing modern authors who have this common, albeit less accurate, usage in their works. Owen himself sometimes uses the word "habit" according to the classical sense of *habitus*. "Nor doth it consist in an habitual disposition of mind unto any outward duties of piety, devotion, or obedience, however obtained or acquired. Such habits there are, both intellectual and moral," *Pneumatologia*, 3.474. My point is not Owen's understanding of what precisely a habit is in this specific quotation, for he is not fully consistent in this passage. However, he does link "disposition" with "habits" in this text, demonstrating, at the very least, that he uses them within the same semantic cluster of ideas.

[15] See Christopher Shields and Robert Pasnau, *The Philosophy of Aquinas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 284; Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 150; Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 196. This is also consistent with Richard Muller's definition: "habitus: *disposition*; specifically, spiritual capacity, belonging to either of the faculties of soul, i.e., to mind or to will. The scholastics assumed that, in addition to defining the faculties of the soul, they also had to acknowledge the capacities or dispositions of those faculties. A faculty cannot receive a datum or act in a manner for which it has no capacity." in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1985), 134. See also Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre*, ed Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation, (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 175-176, for a similar definition that translates *habitus* as disposition.

are also terms within the "disposition" cluster of ideas that I will be looking for in Owen to use as examples of his elaboration of "disposition." They may not all or always be used in a sense that fits within a dispositional context, but the setting in which they are used should make that clear in Owen's text.[16] This means that when I reference the English terms listed previously, I am using them according to the philosophical definition of *habitus* rather than with other present day English connotations for those terms. This is how other writers who explain *habitus* or "disposition" use the concept, and it will allow me greater flexibility and consistency if I am able use these terms in this way.

Although both ancient and medieval philosophers used the idea of "disposition," Aquinas took it and developed it much more comprehensively than anyone before him.[17] Therefore, if we are to understand the concept of "disposition," we will have to involve Aquinas in the discussion. He deals with a key part of humanity's immaterial being. Aquinas tries to explain an "essential element" of our psychology that, as we will later see, plays a key role in the development of virtue. Rather than focusing just on behaviours, "disposition" allows us to explore the deeper faculties of mind, will, and affections. As pastoral theology focuses on abilities that stem largely from one's mental awareness and application of theological concepts, "disposition" is obviously an especially important concept to explore.

[16] I do recognise that these terms all have nuanced differences between each other and are not, strictly speaking, actual synonyms of disposition. However, in looking through Owen's works as well as the works of other members of the reformed scholastic tradition, there is continuity in the way these terms, as well as others, are used in connection with the *habitus* idea. Context is a key part of understanding when Owen uses these terms for the concept of disposition and when they are used in another way. See Kapic, *Communion with God*, 62n135 for more on specifics of the terminology.

[17] Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, 195-197. This is not to say that there is a direct line from Aristotle to Aquinas to Owen, and that there were no other figures addressing the idea of *habitus*. See *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits (Habitus) in Medieval Philosophy* for more on the use of the *habitus* concept in medieval thought. It is worth noting, however, that although this volume focuses on multiple medieval (and earlier) philosophers who discuss the idea of *habitus*, throughout this volume Aquinas is clearly the dominant conversation partner. The select few chapters in this work that have no references to Aquinas deal with philosophers who lived after Aquinas and are thus likely dependent in some form upon Aquinas' earlier development of the idea.

**Disposition and Ethics**

Much of this project will deal with the significant connection between disposition and ethical formulations. "Disposition," is a useful concept to explain the relationship between virtue and practice. In fact, "disposition" is such an integral part of the discussion of virtue that one could see Aquinas' view of "the study of human nature as primarily a study in moral psychology."[18] Virtue, by definition, must involve right action. As Aquinas reminds us, "Virtue denotes a determinate perfection of a power. The perfection of anything, however, is considered especially in its relation to its end. Yet the end of a power is its act. A power is said to be perfect therefore, in so far as it is determined to its act."[19] One's acts are to be evaluated by the standard of virtue; one cannot be virtuous if one's actions are not virtuous. Because virtue is inseparably linked with deed, it is an inherently practical category.[20] Virtue cannot be conceived of as a purely abstract notion, such as imaginary numbers; it must relate to someone's actions. Whether that person is real or theoretical makes little difference to the point that virtue is shown through action. The presence or lack of virtue is demonstrated through the practical results of choices. Even analysing the concept of desire is not a complete sign of the presence or absence of virtue, as virtue is often demonstrated through actions that run counter to one's desires. Though it is possible for seemingly virtuous actions to lack true virtue, through the presence of vicious desires or motivations, virtue cannot be

[18] Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* 151. See Bonnie Kent for more on Aquinas and his application of disposition to virtue. "Virtue theory," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed by Robert Pasnau, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 498-500. For a rebuttal of the idea that virtue is incompatible with a protestant understanding of grace, see Sebastian Rehnman, "Virtue and Grace," in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, (volume 25, number 4, 2012).

[19] *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23 (1a2ae. 55-67): Virtue*, edited by W. D. Hughes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 1969), 1a2ae, Q.55.1. This is not to say that virtue is an act, but rather that the presence of virtue or lack thereof must be determined by action. It is a skill that is demonstrated by its practice. Like playing a musical instrument, the presence or lack thereof is not determined by what exactly a person is doing at any particular moment. But when the occasion calls for that specific skill, action will demonstrate either its absence or its presence.

[20] "The end of virtue, since it is an operative habit [disposition: *habitus operativus*], is its very activity." *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23,* 1a2ae, Q.55.4.

present without virtuous action. A study of virtue necessarily leads to the importance of practice.

But how does virtue produce right action? This is where "disposition" becomes remarkably helpful. Right action must be preceded by right inclination.[21] Oesterle connects the two for us:

> Moral virtue, however, is acquired by practice and not, strictly speaking, by instruction. There are two reasons why the efficient cause of moral virtue is practice rather than instruction. The first reason is that moral virtue cannot be taught, in the proper sense of the term, since virtue is not a matter of knowledge but of action, and teaching is not directly related to action. Secondly, moral virtue is located in the appetitive powers of man, in which there are inclinations or "drives" toward something desirable. The well-formed striving for something desirable can be developed only by practice and exercise.[22]

Desires, inclinations, drives, and appetites are not categories of action, though actions can certainly be desirable or otherwise. All these terms point to something that we want or something that appears pleasing to us, rather than to something that we do. One may desire something without that desire ever leading to an action. Similarly, one may act in a way that is acknowledged as undesirable, such as forgoing the last piece of chocolate cake to allow someone else to have it.[23] However, to desire something is a category of the will or of the mind. Human action is usually related to human desire. The pursuit of an object comes through effort exerted to possess that object because the object is seen as somehow attractive.

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[21] "Disposition" is a category that also impacts the will, as Pasnau shows. But this happens, in part, through the disposition shaping the inclination and desire. "To see how Aquinas is giving the will a real role in the process of choice, we need to focus not on sudden desires for a certain end, but on long-term dispositions that govern our day-to-day choices. The will does not simply endorse the passing judgements of reason, in a neutral fashion, but subjects those judgments to the higher-order aims that shape who we are. The will, in other words, contains habits or disposition that influence the course of its operations (see 1a2ae 50.5). Reason may tell us to cheat, but the will can insist on honesty; reason may counsel silence, but the will can urge us to speak. In such cases it is the will that is in control, in virtue of its fixed dispositions and desires, which hold independently of reason's dictates (considered in the short term). The will cannot entirely repudiate reason, but the will shapes reason just as much as reason shapes will. The will can, for instance, force reason to stop thinking about something. Also, the will can direct reasons to look at something in a different way. (For example, don't think about what you might buy with the money you found; think about how happy someone will be able to get it back). In such cases our higher-order desires take charge over the process of deliberation, turning our thoughts in the directions in which we want them to go." In *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* 228-229.

[22] Oesterle, *Ethics,* 47.

[23] Though in this instance there may be other competing desires that trump one's desire for cake, such as a desire to lose weight, a desire to be selfless, or a desire to appear to be selfless.

Part of working to attain something is coming to see that thing as desirable. In that sense, it is impossible to do something against one's will. Even apparently undesirable actions are done for the sake of either gaining something more desirable or preventing something even more undesirable. For good or for ill, a movement of the inclination is necessary to enable an action. This has clear application for the concept of virtue.[24]

Virtue results in action through the shaping of the inclination and through setting the will in motion toward the action that is consistent with virtue. One's inclination precedes action and moves one towards the things one desires. So moral virtue becomes practice by a movement of the inclination towards that which virtue extols as beautiful, good, and true. The inclination then produces action in accordance with the desired goal. "Disposition" is what shapes the inclination. Thus, to make the leap from virtue to action, one must focus on the disposition. It is through one's disposition that desires are formed and shaped.

> What sort of characteristics are dispositions, and to what sort of action do they lead?
>
> Physiological dispositions of health apart, *human* dispositions are dispositions of *temperament* and of *character*… Dispositions of temperament are such traits as dourness, taciturnity, cheerfulness, melancholy, vivacity, stolidity, sensitivity, delicacy, excitability, placidity, irritability and irascibility. As the etymology of 'temper' suggests, these are *aspects of the nature of a person*. Traits of temper are dispositions of attitudes and modes of responsiveness, traits defined by what they are dispositions to be, feel, become or do, by the manner of one's actions and reactions – for example, to be stern or sullen, sensitive, delicate or excitable in one's responses, to become annoyed with but little reason or to lose one's temper. They are manifest in one's facial expression, tone of voice, gestures and demeanours, in the way one reacts to what befalls one. Traits of personality, such as gentleness, brashness, timidity, pedantry, as well as such sociable characteristics as courteousness, politeness, tactfulness, and perhaps self-evaluative traits such as conceit, vanity, pride, arrogance and humility are also dispositions. They verge upon, and in the case of the latter group, cross the boundary into the sphere of the virtues and vices.[25]

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[24] Oesterle's comments on Aquinas and the pleasure of virtue are helpful: "The morally *virtuous* person is one whose appetite has the order of reason realized in it; his very appetite, in other words, operates with perfectly, and the infallible sign that a person has reached this state of human excellence is that he *enjoys* acting virtuously. The virtuous person, accordingly, is not grim; on the contrary, he experiences genuine pleasure in choosing morally good actions… But the difficulty often associated with moral excellence is at the level of *acquiring* virtue (and here the difficulty cannot be underestimated); *having acquired* the level of virtue, such difficulty is dissipated, and man is then free to lead the good human life with a proportionate degree of enjoyable accomplishments." John Oesterle, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Treatise on the Virtues*, (Prentice Hall, N.J.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), xiv.

[25] P. M. S. Hacker, *Human nature: the categorical framework*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 119-120.

Thus disposition stands behind what we might call personality, and it is closely related to character. It is demonstrated by the way a person responds to a wide variety of situations, both good and bad. It is one's disposition that impacts one's capacities to be, for instance, either joyful or grumpy. But again, it is hard to exhibit a disposition purely in the abstract. Taciturnity and courteousness are both displayed through action. Yet the action demonstrates the presence of something immaterial in a person that precedes the action. A certain disposition is shown through one's action, yet the action itself is "second actuality." The disposition itself is the "first actuality," and its existence is demonstrated through the act of the "second actuality." But how does this relate to virtue?

If disposition is the midpoint between power and act, or between capacity and actuality, then disposition stands between virtue and practice. They are intertwined. The development of right action as the goal of virtue requires a consideration of the necessary disposition, and, as Hacker has pointed out, any evaluation of disposition leads naturally back to a discussion of virtue. "Virtue is a habit [disposition] inclining us to choose the relative mean between extremes of excess and defect."[26] Virtue is the constraint on one's character that shapes it so that it may be productive, such as a sail on a ship constrains the wind in order to power the forward movement of the vessel. Emotion, for example, is naturally uncontrolled. We recognise this instinctively when we see a toddler throwing a tantrum. One's emotion needs constraint to result in productive practice. In children we call this the process of maturity, but adults also need to cultivate dispositional maturity and control as well. Virtue is the sort of constrain on emotion that is desired, the perfecting influence upon the capacities of the affections, and a disposition towards that perfecting influence is necessary to make that constraint desirable.[27]

[26] Oesterle, *Ethics,* 59.

[27] Similarly, such constraint could come from a vicious disposition as well. Dispositions do not necessarily have to be positive characteristics. In fact, as Owen frequently writes, many are not.

To put another way, a certain disposition is what is necessary to make the ethical demands of virtue become reality in practice. Dispositions provide an initial step to help make virtuous living desirable. To talk about either virtue or disposition on its own without also referencing the other is to possess only half the puzzle. For the goal of action that is shaped by virtue, the means is disposition. There is a middle step between ethics and actuality, between moral imperatives and putting those demands into action. Disposition is that central piece – a right inclination is indispensable for virtuous conduct – and it is a piece that is frequently overlooked particularly in contemporary discussions of pastoral theology.

It is noteworthy that the entire second section of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* is taken up with discussions of ethics: virtues, dispositions, and their impact upon human desires and actions. One could say that the centre portion of *ST* is concerned primarily with the right development of Christian character, and it is a larger treatment than either of Aquinas' other two treatments on God and Christ. Why is this so important to Aquinas?

Perhaps the main reason this topic is so important is that our conception of virtue has an impact on how we live. Just as the movement of a sailing ship is largely dependent upon its right handling of the wind for its forward movement, so humans also require appropriate handling of their mental faculties in order to progress through the difficulties of life in a balanced and stable way. Oesterle points out, "Through virtue, we manage anger and pleasure, not by obliterating the movements of passion or by simply giving way to them, but by regulating them to serve us in a human way...virtue is a principle of the operations of the soul."[28] If humans are to be rightly ordered in their affections, it is necessary to consider the categories of virtue. This is particularly true as "virtue [is] the disposition to act well in a regular way."[29] If one wishes to develop the ability to make right actions an ingrained part of

[28] Oesterle, *Ethics*, 54.
[29] Ibid. 45.

one's character, a regular aspect of how one functions, virtue is a key part of the formation of one's mind, will, and affections.

But this is also true for our happiness as humans as well. Aquinas speaks of the necessity of "virtuous dispositions for three reasons: (i) so that we might be *consistent* in what we do, for things that depend on what we do change easily unless they are given stability by the weighting of some disposition," also "(ii) so that we can *readily* do things in the proper way," and "(iii) so that we might *take pleasure in* completing things in the proper way."[30] Consistency, ease, and pleasure in our actions are legitimate reasons for the consideration of virtue. One of the benefits of virtue is that developing virtue leads to virtuous actions becoming an unconscious part of one's responses to life. One can learn to make a good decision without even realising he or she has done so, because the values and reactions have become so ingrained in one's mind. But virtue can become a habit (ingrained pattern of action) only after it has become a disposition (*habitus*). Through gaining the appropriate dispositions, right responses to the vast array of problems one faces can become second nature. A person can even take pleasure in responding well. At least according to Aquinas, a rightly ordered and happy inner person is the goal of virtuous living.

Yet there is an even great goal in this consideration of virtue as well, a sort of goal that can be referred to as a *telos*. As Christian theologians, both Aquinas and Owen have the ultimate *telos* or end for humanity being the glory of God. Ultimate human happiness is accomplished through the pursuit and attainment of this *telos*. In Aquinas this purpose is accomplished through union with God, and in Owen it is accomplished through communion with God.[31] In both their theological formulations God's people most glorify him in their

[30] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, ed by E. M. Atkins and Thomas Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7-8.

[31] There is much more that could be said at this point, but for the sake of space see Kelly M. Kapic's comparison of how this goal differed between these two theologians in "John Owen's Theological Spirituality: Navigating Perceived Threats in a Changing World," in *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* ed by Willem Van Vlastuin and Kelly M. Kapic, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 72.

lives when they demonstrate character that resembles his nature. Their conceptions of virtue are shaped by the scripture's teaching of right relationships between God and humanity and between humanity as neighbours with one another. Virtue shapes both types of interactions, and it does so with the goal of shaping humanity to be more pleasing to God.

Virtue then, refers both the particular sort of behaviour we aim for in our lives and a regular pattern of making use of such virtuous behaviour. But it must be shaped by our desires to be consistent. Disposition, the perfection of such virtue, is how we get there. To focus on behaviour without either focusing on virtue or disposition is to leave behind some of the most important means of accomplishing that behaviour in our lives. It is to prioritise act over mind, conduct over character, immediate goals over a *telos*. What our minds value leads to how we act. Our character shapes our conduct. Our inclinations have a determinative outcome upon our actions.

What do virtue and disposition, then, have to do with pastoral theology? Pastoral theology deals with the application of theology to practice. This practice requires a set of skills to accomplish certain tasks. But merely accomplishing those tasks by rote or developing those skills in the abstract is inadequate for the development of a robust pastoral theology, because pastoral theology also deals with the relationship of theology to the lives of people. To deal well with people one needs a certain disposition. Disposition is a key aspect of the shaping of one's mental faculties so that one can be rightly inclined towards a particular goal. Skills are important and tasks have to be done. But the desires behind those tasks, the inclinations and motivations that are necessary for certain skills, these are concepts that are dealt with through the categories of virtue and disposition. It is not enough simply to do the right thing according to whatever values are shaped by pastoral theology. Instead, pastoral practice requires a virtuous disposition or perfected inclination that informs the normal manner in which the specific tasks of practical theology are carried out. A holistic

practical theology necessitates the presence of the concept of virtue, especially through analysing the idea of right desire in pastoral ministry. A Christian analysis of the concept of disposition informs the goal of pastoral theology. What desires shape the responsibilities of pastoral ministry? How are decisions to be made and problems resolved? These are questions that need to be answered through the lens of virtue, particularly as virtue deals with how the inclination is shaped.

Disposition is a neglected emphasis in pastoral theology, in a large part, because a robust and theologically rooted ethics has been a neglected category in pastoral theology. Dietrich Ritschl has pointed out that for much of Protestantism, ethics is largely absent from everyday considerations. In contrast with contemporary Roman Catholic teaching on ethical matters, Protestants are largely "left alone with their ethical decisions.[32] This has not always been the case in reformed theology. "Ethics" in early reformed thought was originally understood as "a shorthand for Christian conduct to the glory of God, or, conceived more abstractly, as the rationale for that conduct."[33] The branch of theology that became known as "case divinity or practical theology" was a significant emphasis for Protestant theologians in post-reformation Britain.[34] This emphasis would be helpful to regain today in the development of pastoral theology.

It may be that too much focus has been put on the outward aspects of pastoral ministry and not enough on the inward concerns. It may be that, for some theological traditions, pastoral theology has become entirely practical with little to no focus on the theological matters that inform pastoral practice. Similarly, for other traditions, it may be that pastoral theology has become so theological that is contains little focus on application to actual pastoral ministry. But pastoral theology needs to address the inner aspects of one's

[32] Dietrich Ritschl, "The Relation of Ethics to Doctrine," in *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 1988, vol 1, no 1, 39.
[33] Kirk M. Summers, *Morality After Calvin,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10.
[34] Meg Lota Brown, "The Politics of Conscience in Reformation England," in *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. XV, no. 2 (1991), 101.

consciousness, the matters of desire and motivation considered according to a well thought out ethical framework, if it is to be of any use. This is especially true for those involved in pastoral ministry, which in many pastoral theologies is the natural context for the outworking of the various concepts that make up the genre. What if someone were to develop treatments of key pastoral theological issues with this larger ethical framework in mind? What if there was a theologian also trained in classical philosophy who addressed the necessary disposition that makes pastoral theology both theologically robust and also pastorally useful? What sort of a theological treatment could we expect to find from such a person? As is often the case, to rectify a neglected idea in present-day theology, sometimes the best course of action is to look back several hundred years to theologians who came before us.

**Disposition and Owen**

Owen's understanding of philosophical concepts is based on his studies in classical philosophy as mediated through medieval scholasticism. His Oxford tutor, Thomas Barlow, ensured that Owen received substantial exposure to Thomas Aquinas in his early studies.[35] It is largely through Barlow's influence that Owen was given a thorough grounding in the method of scholasticism and the key figures across the spectrum of Christian theology.[36] But Owen's training wasn't only in Christian thought. As a result of his academic training at Oxford, Owen was familiar with the major philosophers throughout history, and he was also comfortable adapting those thinkers for explicitly Christian purposes. Owen was especially familiar with the works of Aristotle, and he demonstrated competence, if not always consistency, in appropriating Aristotelian categories for his own uses.[37]

[35] Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 39; and *John Owen*, 9-10.
[36] Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 32-34.
[37] See Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 181-203 for a summary of Owen's academic influences and the role classical philosophy played in Owen's education. See Brian Kay for a list of the authors Owen cited most commonly; *Trinitarian Spirituality*, (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster,

Aquinas is frequently referenced throughout Owen's works, and occasional citations of *Summa Theologiae* do show up as well. The goal of this project is neither to analyse how accurately Owen used these concepts according to their original or Thomistic framework nor to understand how comprehensively Owen himself understood Thomist thought.[38] Answering these questions would take this project far beyond its original scope. However, as I am interpreting Owen's pastoral theology in light of his use of one of these scholastic and philosophical concepts, it is necessary and helpful to examine a little of the foundation for the idea that Owen uses in his practical theology.

We know from Owen's academic training that he was familiar with Aquinas. Though Owen through his writing career can frequently be hostile to Catholic writers, especially contemporary Roman Catholic writers and their medieval ideological forbearers, his reception of Aquinas is very mixed. In some places Owen can be dispassionate in his reception of Aquinas.[39] Aquinas is just one of the many theological predecessors from whom Owen would naturally have drawn in his historical analysis of theology. Elsewhere Owen can be very positive about Aquinas. He calls Aquinas "one of the great masters" of medieval

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2007), 57-58. Trueman has addressed the general preference for Aristotle versus Plato in the theology of the reformed scholastics in *Claims of Truth*, 36-39, though Rehnman has pointed out that Owen had no qualms with using Plato positively as well; *Divine Discourse*, 39-40. For more on reformed scholasticism, its use of Aristotelian philosophy, and the myth of *the* Aristotelian viewpoint see Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 24-28, 37-39; Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 34-46; Carl Trueman, "A Small Step Towards Rationalism," in *Protestant Scholasticism* ed by Carl Trueman and R. S. Clark, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 181-184, 194-195; Carl Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event," in *Reformation and Scholasticism* ed by Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, 262-264. Willem van't Spijker has noted that there was even an emphasis in protestant scholasticism that the authors of classical philosophy *ought* to be studied for what one could glean from them, even if in a subordinate role to scripture; "Reformation and Scholasticism," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 84-85.

[38] Anthony Kenny describes four separate streams of Thomist interpreters in his foreword to Herbert McCabe's, *On Aquinas*, ed Brian Davies, (London: Burns and Oats, 2008), vii-viii, and that refers only to the modern interpreters of Aquinas. Though Owen certainly received Aquinas through particular influences, namely his tutor Thomas Barlow, his use of Aquinas stems largely from his familiarity with Aquinas' works himself rather than through the interpretations of other authors. There is a full length volume on the subject of John Owen's adaptation of Thomist thought in his theology. See Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, (Farnham, Ashgate: Ashgate, 2013). See Sebastian Rehnman in *The Thomist*, (volume 80, number 1, January 2016) and Ryan McGraw in *Calvin Theological Journal*, (volume 48, number 2, 2013) for critiques of both the approach and the methodology of this volume. At the very least, the existence of a treatment such as Cleveland's demonstrates that Owen's use of Aquinas is noteworthy enough to warrant further investigation.

[39] Owen simply references discussions of which Aquinas was a part, commenting neither positively nor negatively on his particular view. See *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2.21, 25-26.

Catholic theology, and he uses Aquinas' theology against Pelagianism in defence of his own theological purposes against Socinianism.[40] Owen uses a quotation from the *Summa Theologiae* favourably in his *Dissertation on Divine Justice* as a proof of his view of God's passions.[41] He uses Aquinas to support his view of scripture.[42] But Owen can also be hostile to Aquinas, complaining that he is "of no use unto us in this doctrine of justification," in part, because of his reliance upon Aristotle.[43] He refers to some of Aquinas' discussions as "such chaff tossed up and down."[44] Whether or not Owen views Aquinas charitably depends, largely, on whether or not Aquinas' views on a subject fit within Owen's theological framework.[45] If those views do not fit, Owen can be rather caustic about Aquinas. If they do, then Owen has no problem appropriating Aquinas for his own purposes.

It is in one of Owen's positive uses of Aquinas that we see proof of Owen's obvious reliance upon Aquinas for the subject of dispositions (which Owen here refers to as habits). In the lengthy preface to his discussion on the perseverance of the saints, Owen lays out a monergistic understanding of God's grace to combat the Pelagianism he saw as ravaging contemporary Catholic theology. He relies upon Aquinas, Didacus Alvarez, and also references "the Dominicans and present Jansenians" in proof of and understanding of God's grace that "it cannot depend on any free co-operation of our wills, all the good acts tending to our perseverance being fruits of that grace which is bestowed on us, according to the absolute unchangeable decree of the will of God."[46] We also see Owen's use of Aquinas in a discussion on "habitual grace." Owen states that Aquinas "everywhere insists on, that no

[40] Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed,* 11.70.
[41] Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice,* 10.544. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae Q.47.1.
[42] Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,* 1.28.
[43] Owen, *Of Justification*, 5.12. Owen's reference to Aristotle's view of habits demonstrates that he was aware of the philosophical path from Aristotle to Aquinas for the concept of disposition.
[44] Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 5.160.
[45] For more on this point, see Trueman, *John Owen,* 23-25.
[46] Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.70-73. See Rehnman, *Divine Discourse,* 35-37 for more on Owen's use of Catholic scholastic figures in his polemic. Some Jesuits also used certain points of doctrinal similarity between the Jansenists and the Reformed Orthodox against the Jansenists. See Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 578.

habitual grace received, no improvement that can be made of it, by the utmost ability, diligence, and the most raised considerations of the best of men, will cause any one certainly to persevere, without the peculiar preservation of God."[47] He then quotes from *Summa Contra Gentiles* to show that Aquinas' view of habitual grace backs up his own.[48] These comments show that Owen is standing firmly in the scholastic tradition of using Aquinas favourably but not uncritically, especially when it comes to a discussion of dispositions.

Now Owen is not primarily interested in the metaphysical history of dispositions. In fact, he seems to take for granted that his readers will already have some measure of understanding of the concept, an assumption which proves complicated for modern readers.[49] Other than a brief definition of "this *habit*" late in one of his volumes, Owen largely uses the concept without elaboration.[50] He uses the terms disposition and habit interchangeably.[51] He has a preference for the term "gracious habits" when talking about the thing itself and "disposition" when talking about the consequence of the disposition, though this usage is far from universal in his works. He tends to use the term "gracious habit" more often than "disposition," but it is clear he is referencing the same idea. This disposition, then, is a

[47] Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.70-71.
[48] Ibid. 71, See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 3, chapter 155. Though Christopher Cleveland states that the category of infused habits is an example of a "Thomism" in Owen's works, his demonstration of this fact consists of comparing similar language. He omits any reference to Owen's most significant discussion on Aquinas and infused habits found in *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*. See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 4-6, 69-120.
[49] It is important to resist the temptation to use Aristotle, Augustine, or even Aquinas as a straightjacket for Owen's understanding of "disposition." Each author is developing the concept in nuanced ways, and Owen is no exception. An over-emphasis on the tradition of the concept can easily obscure these nuances. See Bonnie Kent, "Speaking Theologically: The Concept of *habitus* in Peter Lombard and His Followers," in *The Ontology, Psychology and Axiology of Habits (Habitus) in Medieval Philosophy,* ed by Nicolas Faucher and Magali Roques, (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 67-85; Marcia Colish, "Habitus Revisited: A Reply to Cary Nederman, *Traditio*, 48.77-92.
[50] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.502. Owen does give a bit of a clarification of Aristotle's concept of disposition, but it is a brief reference, in *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.12.
[51] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.468-469 and 4.308. This is consistent with how Owen uses these terms elsewhere as well. See *Of the Mortification of Sin,* 6.28, and *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed,* 11.20, 514. I do understand that there are those who will quibble with my equating these two terms on the basis that Aquinas has a discussion precisely on the distinction between *habitus* and *dispositio*. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.49.1-2. However, in a thesis that seeks to explore a concept of importance for practical theology, it would seem strange to continually use a non-English word as my key term. Having already demonstrated a valid tradition of scholarly literature which translates *habitus* as "disposition" and using "disposition" as a translation not of *dispositio* but of *habitus,* I will continue to write of "disposition" and "dispositions" in this project.

quality which enables its possessor to acquire or develop certain abilities. He equates several similar terms to explain the various facets of this disposition idea: habit, *habitus*, disposition, and inclination, but it is clear they are overlapping concepts rather than distinct ideas. The abilities which are produced by this disposition lead, in turn, to action, and this action is pointed at the goal of sanctification.

Owen writes that this work is both produced by the Holy Spirit and productive through the life of the believer towards the aim of holiness. The property of this disposition is that it moves its subject towards an appropriate end, in this case, sanctification. That is, it inclines the believer towards holiness; it habituates the believer in the work of sanctification.[52] Yet Owen is clear that this disposition is imparted from outside the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit and that it results in a change in the life of the believer. Though he uses the terms habit and disposition in a very fluid fashion throughout his writings on this disposition, in most cases it is obvious that Owen is referring to one and the same concept.

Within his discussion of the importance of sanctification as a result of regeneration in the lives of believers, Owen presents two theses and their accompanying elaboration as a demonstration of the importance of the idea of disposition in his theology:

> I. There is wrought and preserved in the minds and souls of all believers, by the Spirit of God, a supernatural principle or habit of grace and holiness, whereby they are made meet for and enabled to live unto God, and perform that obedience which he requireth and accepteth through Christ in the covenant of grace; essentially or specifically distinct from all natural habits, intellectual and moral, however or by what means soever acquired or improved.
> II. There is an immediate work or effectual operation of the Holy Spirit by his grace required unto every act of holy obedience, whether internal only in faith and love, or external also; that is, unto all the holy actings of our understandings, wills, and affections, and unto all duties of obedience in our walking before God.

[52] No, habit, as the term is commonly used today, is not a reliable synonym of the disposition idea. Yet it remains true that the work of this disposition does have an habituating effect. The disposition strengthens its subject so that habituation is a natural result. The result of a disposition is that habits, repeated and ongoing responses, can be formed more easily than if the disposition were absent. A disposition results in an inclination toward virtuous patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting.

> I. The first of these assertions I affirm not only to be true, but of so great weight and importance that our hope of life and salvation depends thereon; and it is the second great principle constituting our Christian profession. And there are four things that are to be confirmed concerning it: — 1. That there is such a habit or principle supernatural infused or created in believers by the Holy Ghost, and always abiding in them. 2. That, according to the nature of all habits, it inclines and disposeth the mind, will, and affections, unto acts of holiness suitable unto its own nature, and with regard unto its proper end, and to make us meet to live unto God. 3. [That] it doth not only incline and dispose the mind, but gives it power, and enables it to live unto God in all holy obedience. 4. That it differs specifically from all other habits, intellectual or moral, that by any means we may acquire or attain, or spiritual gifts that may be conferred on any persons whatever.[53]

This portion of text outlines several key priorities for Owen in his treatment of disposition. Though his summary here is by no means exhaustive, it is by far the clearest statement he makes on how disposition fits within his theology. As a key development of the Holy Spirit's work through regeneration, and as a result of the accompanying work of sanctification, Owen explains the Spirit's involvement with God's people in refashioning their inner being to enable them to accomplish all that is involved in evangelical holiness. This is the theological structure within which Owen develops his treatment of the disposition in believers.

What, then, are these dispositions? The key parts of Owen's development of the concept of disposition, especially considered within the framework of his doctrine of sanctification, are as follows: Disposition is a whole-person inclination, disposition is part of a regenerating process God initiates through a work of infusion, and disposition is central to the development of distinctly Christian character. To fill out Owen's discussion of disposition, we will look at each of these aspects in turn in the next three chapters.

## Conclusion

The concept of disposition then, the translation for *habitus* into contemporary English that I have chosen to use, describes an aspect of the human mind that is useful for a description of being and its relation to pastoral theology. It deals with the inclination, and it

[53] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.472-473.

forms a middle point between being able to do something and actually doing something. "Disposition" is necessary to fully describe the relationship between virtue and practice, as the concept of disposition stands at the midpoint between the theory of ethical demands and the practice of right living. This idea is one where John Owen is obviously dependent upon Thomist thought for this conceptual framework, but it is one where Owen's development of the idea is clearly traceable as well. The question then remains, how does Owen use this Thomist concept of disposition? That is the question that the next chapter will seek to answer.

## Chapter 3 – Disposition: An Approachable Ontology

Disposition involves a whole person inclination in Owen's development. He emphasises that each faculty needs to receive specific attention and maturity to result in well-rounded growth for the Christian. Though Owen develops the idea of disposition in a way that is broadly similar to the scholastic tradition and its interpretation of both Aristotle and Aquinas, there are some unique elements to Owen's explanation as well. Owen offers a simplification of Thomist ontology that is surprisingly approachable yet also retains many of Aquinas' key emphases. In this we see both Owen's pastoral sensitivity and his depth of understanding regarding human nature.

### Inclinations

One of the central concepts Owen uses to describe the disposition is "inclination."[1] There is in the human soul "an inclination and tendency to something extrinsic," something Aquinas calls a "natural appetite."[2] Animals and humans both have innate inclinations towards preservation of existence which stand behind the pursuit of food, sexual urges, and the care for their young, things that the inclination perceives of as good.[3] In animals we call this tendency instinct but it is not something that they are aware of. They act on this inclination simply because it is their nature apart from any specific cognitive function. Humans, however, have this inclination in a rational capacity rather than simply as a response to nature. Human inclinations operate on the basis of an unchangeable natural law as well, built into the order of creation, by which we are driven towards ends that we perceive as

[1] Owen describes "the 'spirit' of the mind" as "the inclination and disposition in the actings of it." *Pneumatologia,* 3.251.
[2] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.78.1. See Steven J. Jenson for a helpful summary of inclinations in Aquinas' development, in *Knowing the natural law: from precepts and inclinations to deriving oughts,* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 44-60. See Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 200-209.
[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.94.2.

good. This good is particularly defined as that which we perceive will make us happy.[4] Humans are naturally inclined toward the goal of happiness. Everything one does is, in one way or another, in pursuit of this singular purpose.

Now I have already noted that Owen uses "inclination" as a synonym for the concept of disposition, but he also uses the language of inclination to describe what dispositions do, repeatedly using "inclines and disposes" together to describe the impact of dispositions on human nature.[5] Inclination-related language reminds the reader of the necessity of the concept of ends, for human inclinations point human dispositions in a specific purpose-related direction. In other words, Owen's discussion of inclinations is inherently teleological.[6] While I will explore the specific ways in which both Aquinas and Owen emphasise purposes and ends more fully in my later chapter on "Disposition: the Human Response," it is important to note that both theologians point towards union and communion with God as that which is the ultimate end for humanity.[7] Human beings are created to find their ultimate happiness in God himself, and this inclination was originally built into human nature. This is the great purpose of humanity in Christian theology, to be united to the Divine.[8]

But there is a problem. Human beings, after Adam's fall from grace into sin, no longer desire this union as their chief end. Human inclinations are disordered in the powers of

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.90.1; Q.94.1-5; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.1.7-8; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.592. Aristotle emphasised humanity's natural inclination toward knowing in *Metaphysics*, Book Alpha.1. The concept of inclination is analogous to how he describes "potency" as a certain disposition of a thing towards its appropriate movement in *Metaphysics*, Book Delta.12. Hacker points to the importance of ends in humanity when he points out that "the nature and essence of a being" is connected to "the concept of purpose," in Hacker, *Human Nature*, 175-180. On problems connected with happiness as humanity's ultimate goal, yet without denying that happiness is this ultimate goal, see Oesterle, *Ethics*, 22-29. Brian Davies points out that Aquinas uses two different terms for happiness, one referring to an "earthly happiness" and the other referring to the "ultimate good." See Brian Davies, "Happiness," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 231-232.
[5] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.302, 383, 473, 543, 621.
[6] See Jenson, *Knowing the Natural Law*, 60.
[7] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.3.1; Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, 2.5-6, 9. Kelly Kapic has written extensively on Owen's development of this concept in *Communion with God*, passim.
[8] Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.337-338.

the soul.[9] This disorder leads to an inability to fully pursue either this ultimate goal or any temporal goal of happiness as well. Humans are still inclined towards happiness, but due to the disorder in their faculties, their attempts at happiness are inevitably frustrated. More than that, because of sin, human attainment of the ultimate happiness found in seeing God is impossible.[10] There is in humans an inclination towards that which they are unable to reach. Natural teleology in a post-lapsarian world is inherently futile. The internal disorder of the soul that follows is the source of human misery and suffering.

All is not lost, however, as through God's grace believers are given new dispositions that rightly incline them toward their ultimate goal. Through the gift of God, believers receive a "new spiritual bent and inclination of the soul."[11] Notice how Owen describes the way dispositions work in believers:

> As this principle of inherent grace or holiness hath the nature of a habit, so also hath it the properties thereof. And the first property of a habit is, that *it inclines and disposeth* the subject wherein it is unto acts of its own kind, or suitable unto it. It is *directed unto a certain end,* and *inclines unto acts or actions which tend thereunto,* and that with evenness and constancy. Yea, moral habits are nothing but *strong and firm dispositions and inclinations unto moral acts and duties* of their own kind, as righteousness, or temperance, or meekness. Such a *disposition and inclination*, therefore, there must be in this new spiritual nature, or principle of holiness, which we have described, wherewith the souls of believers are inlaid and furnished by the Holy Ghost in their sanctification."[12]

God uses the process of sanctification through the work of the Holy Spirit to incline believers towards himself. Humans possess certain powers, and these powers are able to produce acts. But there is a middle step between power and act: disposition. The tendency of a disposition

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[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.85.5; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.488, 642**.** See Kapic, *Communion with God*, 54-55.

[10] For more on the beatific vision, see Owen, *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded,* 7.336; *Christologia*, 1.239; *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, 1.292ff; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl., Q.92. For the differences between how Aquinas and Owen formulate the beatific vision see 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*, 141-158; Simon Francis Gaines OP, "Thomas Aquinas and John Owen on the Beatific Vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald," in New Blackfriars, vol.97, No.1070 (2016, July), 432-446.

[11] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.484. This inclination comes as a result of the infusion of a "disposition of heart and soul," in *Pneumatologia*, 3.483. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.63.3. Intellectual virtue refers to virtues of the mind, and moral virtue refers to virtues of the will and passions. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.58.3.

[12] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.482, (emphasis mine).

toward a certain act is called an inclination. What is the inclination that God imparts to Christians, or stated another way, how can Christians ultimately be happy? Owen explains that a gracious disposition is a new spiritual nature which gives a person an inclination towards the righteousness and holiness that is essential for believers to be able to see God.[13] The Holy Spirit inclines believers towards his purposes in sanctification. Just as moral dispositions produce inclinations towards moral duties, so gracious dispositions produce inclinations towards spiritual duties. The concept of inclinations necessitates an examination of the faculties of soul to see how human powers are to be rightly ordered to their proper goal.[14]

The importance of inclinations in Owen's development of the concept of dispositions is that an inclination is what a disposition provides. Inclinations are how dispositions drive a person towards certain ends. As in the bicycle analogy I used earlier, a disposition imparts both the impetus to move from mere potentiality to ride a bicycle and the inclination which brings about the putting of that ability into action. Dispositions give inclinations, and these inclinations in turn lead from potentiality to actuality. Though Owen sometimes uses the terms inclination and disposition interchangeably, his emphasis on inclinations is that new dispositions give the soul the inward drive that is necessary to pursue union and communion with God with the whole of one's being.

**Powers of the Soul**

It is clear that dispositions produce inclinations. But where do dispositions come from, or, to ask the question more precisely, which parts of humans have dispositions? Owen

[13] In his commentary on Hebrews 12.14 Owen states, "there are two things in the words: 1. The duty itself enjoined; and that is holiness. 2. The enforcement of it from its absolute necessity in order unto our eternal blessedness; for without it, destitute of it, we shall never see the Lord… This sight of God in Christ, which is intellectual, not corporeal; finite, not absolutely comprehensive of the divine essence; is the sum of our future blessedness." Owen, *An Exposition the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 7.287; see also Owen, *Christologia*, 1.242; *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, 1.288

[14] See McCabe, *On Aquinas*, 73-78.

points to the parts of human nature that are the subjects of new dispositions. "That in the sanctification of believers, the Holy Ghost doth work in them, *in their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections,* a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God; wherein the substance or essence, the life and being, of holiness doth consist."[15] Owen's development of the idea of disposition emphasises that the powers of mind, will, and affections are all impacted by a new and gracious disposition. These three faculties, which Owen describes as the "natural faculties of the soul," form the primary way Owen divides the powers of the soul.[16]

What then is the soul? Aquinas describes the soul as the "first principle of life."[17] To say it slightly differently, for a body to have life requires a soul. Not every body is alive, therefore a body requires something else for life. That something Aquinas refers to as a "soul." Owen uses the Genesis account of creation to describe how God creates Adam with a physical body but then imparts to him a "living soul" which animates that physical body.[18] Both Aquinas and Owen refer to a union of body and soul.[19] The soul is the "housing" for the faculties or powers of mind, will, and affections, but these faculties have an impact upon how the body perceives and acts as well. Though thinking, choosing, and feeling flow from the soul, they also have embodied aspects. But what are these powers or faculties?

To explain this point, it will be necessary to examine some of the specifics of Aquinas' layout of the human soul. One of the difficulties of comparing the views of these two theologians is that their terminology does not overlap precisely. However, there is

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[15] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.468–469 (emphasis mine).
[16] Ibid. 168; see also 3.222, 238, 315, 318-319, 330-335, 469, 482-484, 493-496, 529, 568. Owen is not unique in focusing on these three particular powers, but his consistent emphasis on all three is notable. See à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 1.320-325, 3.5, 7-8, and Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 5.10.8-9, for two contemporary continental theologians who emphasised the primacy of the mind and the will, though à Brakel does make regular reference to the affections as well; *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 4.254-255 is a notable example of this exception. For more on the use of faculty psychology among the reformers and the reformed orthodox see Richard Muller, *PRRD*, 1.355-359. See also Kapic, *Communion with God*, 45-57.
[17] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.75.1.
[18] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.99-101.
[19] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, QQ.75-76; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.100.

enough similarly of language to be able to evaluate and contrast their views. There are five powers or faculties in Aristotelian faculty psychology: the vegetative power, the locomotive power, the sensitive power, the intellectual power, and the appetitive power.[20] Of these, the vegetative and locomotive powers have no bearing on the subject of dispositions, at least as relates to Owen, since they are merely the faculties responsible for growth and movement and have no connection to the subject of virtue. The sensitive power is then further divided into exterior and interior sense.[21] Neither of these external or internal sensitive powers relates specifically to virtue, as they are powers that influence one's reason but are not themselves subject to reason. The remaining two powers do have significant bearing on this discussion.

Aquinas distinguishes between the "appetitive" power and the "intellectual" power; the intellectual power consists of mind or reason, and the appetitive power is further subdivided between the sensitive appetites and the intellectual appetite.[22] Owen uses mind, or the intellectual power, and will, or the intellectual appetite, in largely the same way as Aquinas, as we have already seen. Both Aquinas and Owen agree that the intellect is a guiding faculty and the will is a ruling faculty.[23] Both theologians agree that there are dispositions of the mind and of the will.[24] It is in the way they refer to the sensitive appetites, desires, passions, and affections, that there is some distinction.

This triad of faculties, mind, will, and affections, is also an essential aspect of what Owen understands the image of God in humanity to be. The image consists, at least in part, in a right functioning of the "understanding, will, and affections," and it forms the principal "rational faculties and powers of [the] soul."[25] It is the renewal of this image of God that

[20] Aristotle develops this most succinctly in his work *De Anima,* which Aquinas then borrows from and builds on in his *Summa Theologiae*. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q78.1.
[21] The exterior sensitive sense is what we call the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, seeing, and the internal sensitive sense is the basis for common sense, phantasy, imagination, estimation, and memory. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q78.3-4.
[22] Ibid. Q.78.1
[23] Ibid. Q. 82.5; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.238.
[24] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica 1a2ae*, 50.4-5; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.330-335.
[25] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.169.

results in a God-ward disposition in humanity. Owen writes of "the minds and souls of all believers," "our understandings, wills, and affections," and "the mind, will, and affections" as all being the proper subjects of this Spirit-enabled disposition.[26] When Owen refers to "the minds and souls of all believers," he is referring to the part of human nature that is able to receive or contain dispositions.[27]

Humanity, from its very origin, was given this triad of faculties. Owen's reference point for the concept of disposition is the way in which God endowed humanity at the original creation.

> A universal rectitude of nature, consisting in light, power, and order, in his understanding, mind, and affections, was the principal part of this image of God wherein he was created. And this appears, as from the nature of the thing itself, so from the description which the apostle giveth us of the renovation of that image in us by the grace of Christ.[28]

Humanity was created morally upright and inclined towards God. Adam's whole nature was rightly ordered and functioned properly. Yet because of the fall the Spirit's life-giving work upon these faculties is essential for fallen humanity to receive a renewed nature.

Each of these faculties of the triad is the subject of a disposition or inclination and has a distinct role in the way humans function. Owen's explanation of the concept of the dispositions leads his readers to consider the ways in which the mind, the will, and the affections function in both ordinary human existence and their orientation either towards or against God. People are disposed to think, to act, and to feel in certain ways. Examining these faculties separately provides helpful insight into the way people function. In that respect, Owen's analysis here is every bit as psychological as it is theological. His understanding of theology leads him to explore the functionality of human awareness, particularly as it relates to the theological purpose of humanity. As we shall see, Owen's examination of this triad of

[26] Ibid. 472-473.
[27] Ibid. 472.
[28] Ibid. 101. Owen also refers to Christ's human nature as the example of a rightly ordered and correctly functioning triad of faculties of the soul. See ibid. 167-171; Kapic, *Communion with God*, 55-56.

faculties is the basic building block of his faculty psychology and is deeply connected to the rest of his theological development.

### *The Heart*

Though it is not properly a part of Owen's triad of ontology, there is a term Owen uses to describe the subject of dispositions in the powers of the soul. This is what Owen understands scripture referring to as the heart, a representative summary of all the faculties of mind in a person. Owen uses the "heart" to describe the entirety of the disposition's impact on human faculties.

> And the heart in the Scripture is taken for the whole rational soul, not absolutely, but as all the faculties of the soul are one common principle of all our moral operations. Hence it hath such properties assigned unto it as are peculiar to the mind or understanding, as to see, perceive, to be wise, and to understand; and, on the contrary, to be blind and foolish; and sometimes such as belong properly to the will and affections, as to obey, to love, to fear, to trust in God. Wherefore, the principle of all our spiritual and moral operations is intended hereby.[29]

All these faculties interact with and are interwoven with each other in the heart. Human beings are unified as a complete entity, and though they individually have diverse components and varied capacities, these components and capacities work together in connection with our moral values and capabilities.

The heart, as Owen understands the scriptural teaching, encompasses the whole of our rationality, our desires and emotions, and our wills.[30] When people think, feel, or act wisely, they do so as entire persons. The heart functions wisely. When they act or desire foolishly, they also do as complete entities. All our various faculties are united in pursuit of a common goal. We may feel conflict in our use of these various capacities, such as when we want something we know is bad for us, yet our actions reflect a combination of will, mind, and affections. The heart is a synecdoche for all of how a person thinks, feels, desires, and acts.

[29] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.326.
[30] William Fenner emphasises the importance of the heart, especially in relation to the affections in *A treatise of the affections*, 16-35.

Owen points to original sin as the critical problem in human nature, the problem that impacts all these various faculties and makes them unreliable guides for our desires and behaviour. The heart requires transformation, as natural humanity possesses only a "heart of stone."[31] But Owen also points to the Spirit's renewing work as that which provides a new heart for humanity, that is to say, new dispositions in the mind, will, and affections.

From the way Owen routinely groups these terms as a unit it is obvious that he wants to hold them together in a somewhat fluid fashion in this treatment.[32] He uses various combinations of the terms will, mind, understanding, and affections throughout this treatise as a summary of the "natural faculties of the soul."[33] Just as the "whole soul" was "brought under the power of various lusts and passions, captivating the mind and will unto their interests," so the "whole soul" through the work of renovation is "inclined, disposed, enabled, to fear the Lord always, and to walk in all his ways and statutes accordingly, with an internal habitual conformity…unto the law of God."[34] What Owen says of one faculty he means to be included with the others; it is not possible for a person to act merely with the will or entirely with the affections. Humans are more complicated than that. Owen is using these various terms to describe the unseen part of human nature, the whole of how one thinks, feels, desires, and perceives.

[31] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.326-327.
[32] Since he uses several different formulations of the same terms, we should understand him as referring to these essentially different aspects of humanity as all part of one and the same "inner man," as he cites from Ephesians 3:16. See Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.419, 491-492. He will also draw a different distinction between the faculties of the soul, which he understands as the affections, and the spirit, which he understands as the mental faculties. But he is quick to point out that these faculties do not operate independently of each other. "Our bodies are an essential part of our natures, and by their union with our souls are we constituted individual persons. Now we are the principles of all our operations as we are persons; *every moral act we do is the act of the whole person.*" Ibid. 420, (emphasis mine).
[33] Ibid.168; also 102, 168, 228, 282, 318, 329, 437, 641-644.
[34] Ibid. 642, 383.

### *Mind*

Owen describes the mind as the "guiding and leading" or "leading, conducting faculty."[35] This is the faculty that Aquinas describes as the intellect.[36] The mind is the power responsible for apprehension and consideration, the "faculty of the rational soul by which man understands and judges between intelligible things presented to him."[37] It is the part of a human that we could say thinks, that determines and evaluates. Aristotle and Aquinas held that the intellect was the most noble power in humanity, and Owen follows this hierarchy.[38] The mind is the faculty or power responsible for reason and rationality. The disposition of the mind determines whether the mind will function according to its divinely intended purpose or according to a merely human purpose.

Despite the fall of humanity resulting in a diminished capacity of the mind, Owen emphasises that the mind is still able to function. There is an innate knowledge of God's law, even if only in a shadowy sense.[39] This diminished capacity relates specifically to divine concepts rather than to natural concepts. In an unregenerate state human minds are capable of learning and understanding "things natural, civil, or political, or moral," and even in exploring the concepts of natural theology.[40] The noetic effect of sin limits human rationality,

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[35] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.238, 330. See Kapic, *Communion with God*, 46-50, for more on the importance of the mind in Owen's theology.
[36] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.79.
[37] Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, 4.82-83. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.8.1. See à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1.314-320. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.77.4, Q.79. See Kenny, *Metaphysics of Mind*, 123-139.
[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.82.3; Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, 4.88.
[39] Aquinas refers to an innate and infallible knowledge of God's law as synderesis, and it stands behind the conscience. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.79.12-13. See Tobias Hoffmann, "Conscience and *Synderesis*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 255-264. Owen does not use the term synderesis, but he deals extensively with the conscience in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* vol.6, and his treatments of sin and temptation, in *Works* vol.6. Owen puts the conscience in the passive part of the mind, alongside the affections, rather than as a subset of the intellective power, for the conscience is responsible for both the feeling of shame and the desire to avoid defilement as the consequences of sin. See *Pneumatologia*, 3.350, 231-233. The mind becomes aware of sin, and the conscience is provoked, *Pneumatologia*, 3.301. Owen discusses the role of the mind and its relationships to the innate knowledge of God's law in *Pneumatologia*, 3.303ff, 565, and *The Reason of Faith*, 4.86.
[40] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.248; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, Q.2.3-4; Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, 10.496; *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1.7. For more on natural theology see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, QQ.2-27; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.3-4; Muller, *PRRD*, 1.270-310.

but it does not erase it.[41] Though the impact of sin upon the mind does not mean that unregenerate humanity is wholly irrational, it does mean there is no natural understanding of that which is spiritual.[42] Yet Owen does emphasise the negative impact of sin upon the human mind. He makes the startling claim that the natural mind has no advantage over no mind at all as to its ability to understand the things of God.[43] He states that the effects of sin involve the "corruption, or depravation of the minds of all unregenerate men," so that "they are not able of themselves, by their own reasons and understandings, however exercised and improved, to discern, receive, understand, or believe savingly, spiritual things, or the mystery of the gospel...without an effectual, powerful work of the Holy Spirit."[44]

In those whom the Holy Spirit regenerates, the mind is renewed and enabled to rightly understand the truth of scripture. Before regeneration, the mind stands in need of renovation; it is corrupted through sin. Through regeneration the mind is convinced "through an immediate influence and impression of [God's] power" and is "effectually renewed."[45] Through the work of the Spirit the mind is given the ability to function according to its true capacity for spiritual knowledge. "The grace, therefore, here asserted in the giving of an understanding is the causing of our natural understandings to understand savingly."[46] Though faith is essential in order for the mind to function correctly, Owen still emphasises that humans must make use of their rational faculties in order to correctly understand scripture and theological concepts.[47] The Spirit's activity is critical to giving life to the mind and the

[41] Aquinas argues that if reason were destroyed altogether, then humans would essentially become beasts and would no longer be capable of sin. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, 85.2
[42] "Men have not lost their natural intellective faculty or reason absolutely. It is continued unto them, with the free though impaired use of it, in things natural and civil. And it hath an advance in sin; men are "wise to do evil:" but it is lost as to the especial use of it in the saving knowledge of God and his will." Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.331. This is the distinction between aided and unaided reason. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.263-264, 268; *The Reason of Faith*, 4.92.
[43] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.331
[44] Ibid. 248-249.
[45] Ibid. 319, 315
[46] Ibid. 331.
[47] It is beyond the scope of this project to analyse the relationship between reason and faith in Owen's theology. For more on that relationship see Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.8-11; Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*,

understanding, which result in their proper functionality.[48] As a result of this divine work, the natural mind is renewed and illuminated so that it can understand, even if incompletely, God's self-revelation to his people.

The importance of the right use of mind is demonstrated by Owen's interactions with both "rationalists" and "enthusiasts."[49] His philosophy of mind helps him chart a middle path between either the complete and exclusive dependence on one's rational capacities or the complete rejection of mind regarding the work of the Holy Spirit and the interpretation of scripture in the life of the believer. Owen spent a great deal of effort combating these two influences throughout his life.

Being able to understand scripture correctly requires diligence in the outward means necessary for understanding its truths rather than simply relying on the Spirit for an immediate revelation. This was Owen's complaint against those he called "enthusiasts." He emphasises that "the use of the means" is necessary in order to receive right knowledge and understanding into that which is "useful unto our own and others' edification."[50] Though human mental capability on its own is an insufficient tool to comprehend the things of God, God is still pleased to use the means of human rationality in the understanding of scripture.[51] These means require faith and diligence, and they are the product of the Spirit's work upon

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109-128; "John Owen on Faith and Reason," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, 31-48.

[48] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.332-334.

[49] Two notable examples of the sort of opponents Owen interacted with are Samuel Parker and George Fox. Parker was a Anglican who opposed Owen in writing at great length and sought to reduce the role of the supernatural in contemporary discussions of theology to what was able to be understood by human reason. See his *A defence and continuation of the ecclesiastical politie by way of letter to a friend in London* (1671). Fox was the founder of the movement that became known as the Quakers. For a brief summary of Quakers and their association as "enthusiasts" with the likes of theologians such as Owen, see Kapic, *Communion with God,* 199-202, and "The Spirit as Gift," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology,* 120-121 with particular attention to fn 31. Ironically, Parker considered Owen an enthusiast and the Quakers considered Owen a rationalist.

[50] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.6.

[51] Ibid. 11-12.

their own intellectual capacities.[52] This disposition of the mind must be active in the interpretation of scripture if one is to be able to understand it rightly. God uses means to help his people understand both his word and his works. In other words, rather than working in believers immediately through a direct revelatory action on the part of the Holy Spirit, God gives believers the disposition of the mind that enables them to comprehend written scripture.

Yet scriptural interpretation is not a merely intellectual exercise, as he accuses his "rationalist" opponents of believing; it requires divine help. "Neither can the Scriptures be interpreted aright but by the aid of that Spirit by which they were indited."[53] The Spirit must be a part of one's work to comprehend the meaning of scripture. Though a comprehension of the meaning of the actual words of scripture is available to all (the words themselves do not have some sort of inherent or "special" meaning apparent only to believers), the correct interpretation of scripture comes from the use of "spiritual ways and means" for "the understanding of the deep things of God."[54] To neglect the work of the Holy Spirit is to neglect a key part of the God's involvement in human sanctification. The ability to interpret scripture comes from a God-given disposition of the mind rather than solely flowing from one's own intellectual capacities.

Owen rejects "rationalism" as heartily as he rejects "enthusiasm."[55] The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is key for the proper understanding of scripture, yet the Spirit's work does not come at the expense of the right use of one's mind. Proper scriptural interpretation requires the divine work of the Holy Spirit upon the disposition of the mind, the will, and the affections; without either of these components of the Holy Spirit or the disposition one's understanding and application of scripture will be faulty. Owen writes that

[52] Ibid. 6. He further describes those oppose him on this point as stemming from "satanical delusions, diabolical suggestions, and foul enthusiasms, which have been pretended to proceed from the Spirit of God, and to be of a divine original," in ibid. 13
[53] Ibid. 6.
[54] Ibid. Owen continues, "for although the letter of the Scripture and the sense of the propositions are equally exposed to the reason of all mankind, yet the real spiritual knowledge of the things themselves is not communicated unto any but by the especial operation of the Holy Spirit."
[55] Ibid. 11-12.

both "enthusiasm" and "rationalism" demonstrate a serious misunderstanding of one or the other of these key aspects of the Spirit's work. He writes to protect believers from the opposing dangers of "enthusiasm," a misguided reliance upon the Holy Spirit at the expense of rational thinking, and "rationalism," a mistaken dependence solely upon one's own mind to understand divine things.

This concern to emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit is part of why Owen was so frustrated by "rationalism" and "enthusiasm." Not only did they both flow from faulty ontologies, but more than that, they robbed the Holy Spirit of his glory. The one de-emphasised the inability of unaided reason to comprehend the things of God, the other overemphasised the Spirit's work to the exclusion of any change that actually takes place in believers.

The mind, then, requires a specific disposition to function appropriately.[56] The mind is key in both the work of conviction of sin and the understanding of scripture. Believers need a disposition which inclines their mind towards its intended functionality, the ability to rightly desire, receive, and understand scripture. The "rational, contemplative power" of the mind is essential for both the "work of conviction" and "a due consideration of sin."[57] The Holy Spirit's work of sanctification is described as a new spiritual disposition of mind that enables holiness of thought.[58] Prayer then becomes a right disposition of the mind, and this disposition is a continual pattern rather than an infrequent act.[59] Owen also refers extensively to the need for being "spiritually minded" as an example of the right disposition of mind in

[56] See Muller, *PRRD,* 1.356-359, for more on the different dispositions of mind that are involved in the processes of knowing and believing. While Owen does make use of these various *habitus* that Muller references, when he refers to a disposition of the mind in relation to the other faculties of the triad, he is usually referring to a general disposition towards the right use of that faculty, from which flow the other dispositions of mind that Muller explores.
[57] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.350; Owen also contrasts the spiritual mind with the carnal mind, *Pneumatologia*, 3.288, 332-333.
[58] Ibid. 500, 551.
[59] Owen, *A Discourse on the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 4.323.

action.[60] Using the mind according to a Spirit-empowered disposition is key to Owen's understanding of how the whole human soul should operate in a God-ward direction.

Owen refers to the disposition of the mind as that which directs the mind to appropriately learn and apply spiritual concepts. It is essential for the right interpretation of scripture, and it guards against either overemphasising or deemphasising the use of the mind. The influence of the mind is a core part of how Owen explores the topic of human ability to correctly understand and apply God's purposes for human living.

### *Will*

The second component of Owen's triad of human faculties is the will. He defines the will as "the ruling, governing faculty of the soul" or that which is responsible for choice.[61] Owen points to the significance of the will in Aristotelian ontology, as "all moral [dispositions] are seated in the will," and intellectual dispositions have a significant influence upon the will.[62] If the mind is corrupt and unable to function properly because of sin, the central problem of the fallen will is that it needs life. It is from the will's "depravation by nature that we are said to be dead in sin."[63] In Owen's theology, the wills of unregenerate

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[60] See the first part of *The Grace of Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 7.263-394 for Owen's development of the importance of mind in the process of responding rightly to temptation. The second half of the work is devoted to the impact of spiritual mindedness on the affections.

[61] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.238. For a Thomist response to Gilbert Ryle's scepticism on the existence of the will in *The Concept of Mind* (1949), see Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 234-235 and Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, 84-86. Gavin John McGrath helpfully avoids overemphasising the will in Owen's theology. He points out that "while no one faculty was considered more important than the others by Baxter and Owen," there is a pronounced "prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's initiatives in the divine/human encounter." See *Puritans and the human will: voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century Puritanism as seen in the works of Richard Baxter and John Owen,* (Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 1989), 1-3. McGrath argues that a focus on voluntarism in Owen's theology helps one "appreciate the *willingness* in the Christian life" that is so key to gaining a holistic perspective on puritan spirituality, in *Puritans and the human will,* 72. For the broader problem of identifying voluntarism in Protestant though, particularly as it relates to the development of ethics, see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2006), 54-69.

[62] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.502-503. Aristotle focuses on the will as the faculty responsible for voluntary action in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1-5.

[63] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.334.

humans are enslaved because of sin, and true freedom of the will can only come through the Spirit's work of renewal and restoration.

Though the will is naturally enslaved to sin, it is freed through "a reaction between grace and the will, their acts being contrary, and that grace is therein victorious, and yet no violence or compulsion is offered unto the will."[64] Through this process God gives life to the will. The will's renewal is a divine work rather than a function of unregenerate humanity's ability.[65] Sanctification then follows on, for through the Spirit's work "in believers there is a will of doing good, an habitual disposition and inclination in their wills unto that which is spiritually good."[66] Though Owen's exploration of the fallen human will is a largely negative portrayal, when dealing with the wills of believers he points to the necessity of the will to be "freed, enlarged, and enabled to answer the commands of God for obedience" in the process of sanctification.[67]

Owen denies that apart from or prior to a work of God's grace there be anything properly referred to as a free will in humans.[68] Human nature, including the will, is born into slavery because of sin. It is only through a divine intervention that the will can be liberated. This is one aspect of Owen's development of disposition where he both heavily borrows from and seemingly departs from Aquinas, for Aquinas emphasises that justification comes as a result of an infusion of grace so that humans are enabled to move towards God of their own

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[64] Ibid. 319.

[65] "And that this is so might be fully evinced, as by others so by the ensuing arguments; for if the Holy Ghost do not work immediately and effectually upon the will, producing and creating in it a principle of faith and obedience, infallibly determining it in its free acts, then is all the glory of our conversion to be ascribed unto ourselves, and we make ourselves therein, by the obediential actings of our own free will, to differ from others who do not so comply with the grace of God; which is denied by the apostle, 1 Cor. 4:7." Ibid. 334. Regarding Owen's theology of the will, Kapic points out the "dynamic relationship between the sovereign Creator and his living creation" in *Communion with God*, 51. Joel Beeke and Jan van Vliet warn against overemphasising the importance of voluntarist emphases in reformed theology. See "The Marrow of Theology," in *The Devoted Life,* ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall Gleason, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 56-64.

[66] Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Sin in Believers,* 6.160.

[67] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.396.

[68] Ibid. 494-496. Kenny explains that there are two sense of the will, "the ability to have volitions" and "the power to act voluntarily." See Kenny, *Metaphysics of Mind,* 81-82. Aquinas distinguishes between these two sense of the will in *Summa Theologiae,* 1a, QQ.82-83. Owen, however, denying the concept of free-will apart from regeneration, generally elides both of these senses of the will. See *Pneumatologia*, 3.80-81. For the distinction between voluntary and free acts see Oesterle, *Ethics,* 64-100.

free will.[69] In Aquinas' discussion of the category of free-will it is not entirely clear that his understanding of free-will is precisely the same as that which Owen attacks.[70] Owen however, in typically reformed fashion, completely repudiates any notion of free-will, at least rhetorically. Owen's response to the concept of free-will is that it is a Pelagian notion that essentially means "God promiseth to convert us, on condition that we convert ourselves."[71] He states that, "They who so boast of the strength of free-will in the work of our conversion, are themselves an example what it is being given up to so vile an error,—destitute of the grace of God."[72] Free-will in fallen humanity is a non-category to Owen. The very nature of sin means it enslaves the will in the deadness of sin, and if the will is dead because of sin, then there cannot be any sort of freedom in the will of unregenerate humanity. But this creates a different problem for Owen, for he emphasises both that if the will is "compelled, it is destroyed," and that God renews the wills of humans without "violence or compulsion unto the will."[73] How does this work, and are Owen's explanations and distinctions coherent?

Owen's answer is that freedom of the will can only come about as a direct work of God. "As it is a free principle, it is determined unto its acts in this case by the powerful operation of the Holy Ghost, without the least impeachment of its liberty or freedom; as hath

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[69] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.113.8. Aquinas states that a free will is required in order for humans to be rational creatures and to be able to respond to external commands, promises, and warnings, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.83.1. But though he emphasises the importance of natural free-will, he seems cautious about how far to push the idea, even making God the ultimate cause behind the freedom of the will, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a, Q.83.1.ro3. He later defines the impact of sin and the loss of free will not as the loss of "natural liberty, which is freedom from coercion, but as regards freedom from fault and happiness," *Summa Theologiae,* 1a, Q.83.2.ro3. Kenny describes Aquinas' view on this point as "soft determinism." See Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind,* 75-88. Pasnau comments on Aquinas' use of Augustine in a discussion of disposition and the will, "Aquinas resists the Augustinian suggestion that he never could have overcome his weakness on his own. Augustine, in giving all the credit to God, implies that we are helpless in the face of our own weakness. This is quite alien to Aquinas's approach." In *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* 252.

[70] Aquinas asserts both that God's grace is necessary prior to any meritorious act of the will and that apart from such grace the human will cannot in any way be changed or change itself. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.109.6-7.

[71] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.326. Owen's hostility to any notion of free will prior to the Spirit's regenerating work is evident in the subtitle to his first published work: "a discovery of the old Pelagian idol free-will," in *A Display of Arminianism,* 10.1.

[72] Owen, *The Greater Catechism,* 1.486; see also 1.475.

[73] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.319.

been declared."[74] Prior to the Spirit's work, humanity is only able to choose sin and is completely unable to choose true righteousness. But by giving the will life, God frees the will from its slavery to sin and turns the will toward God. How is this different than Aquinas' infused grace resulting in the freedom of the will? Owen's response is that God not only gives life to the will, he also works with such an "internal efficiency of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men," that his work on their wills "is infallible, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious."[75] God does not merely enable the turning of the will, he actually moves human will himself. How then is there no compulsion?

Here Owen again depends upon Aquinas. "The will, in the first act of conversion (as even sundry of the schoolmen acknowledge), acts not but as it is acted, moves not but as it is moved; and therefore is passive therein, in the sense immediately to be explained."[76] Owen's explanation is that the "Scripture says not that God gives us ability or power to believe only,—namely, such a power as we may make use of if we will, or do otherwise; but faith, repentance, and conversion themselves are said to be the work and effect of God."[77] The first act of regeneration upon the wills of unbelievers is a creating of faith and a changing of the disposition of the will so that those whom the Spirit draws are effectively renewed. The Spirit gives life to the dead wills of the unregenerate and transforms those wills so that they are brought willingly to himself. Owen, aware of the tension in what he is explaining, describes this process further. As to the will considered "subjectively," it is "merely passive" and only acted upon, but considered "efficiently," the "will, as being acted," also "acts itself."[78] This is the "reaction" he wrote of. As the Spirit moves the will and creates life in it, so also the renewed creature desires this process of movement. The will is created with the capacity to be transformed by the Spirit of God, and through God's grace it is both disposed to be moved

[74] Ibid. 334.
[75] Ibid. 317.
[76] Ibid. 319–320. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q.83.1.ro3
[77] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.320.
[78] Ibid. 322; see also à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.209-210.

and also through that disposition consents to movement itself as well.[79]

The disposition of the will points to Owen's complete dependence on God for the whole of the process of salvation. He attempts to guard against any sort of human response to God out of purely nature ability. A will that is dead cannot be the source of its own life. A soul enslaved to sin has no power to free itself. But Owen also wants to protect against renewed humans becoming completely passive in the process of renewal. According to Owen, the Spirit brings about such a radical transformation in humanity that the will is unstoppably but also willingly drawn to Christ. Through this Spirit-accomplished work, the will itself begins to function according to the God-given disposition and is now "being enlarged by light and love," but it also "willeth and chooseth freely the things of God, *having received spiritual power and ability so to do.*"[80] Once believers have been renewed, then their wills are rightly disposed towards the end God has given them, namely, communion with himself. This is a key part of Owen's later development of sanctification, as the disposition of the will is a significant part of the battle that believers feel in themselves between sin and grace. Though there is still a remnant of the old sinful inclination, the new disposition of the will results in a desire to turn away from sin and towards God.

### *Affections*

Whereas writers such as à Brakel and Turretin emphasise the mind and will as the higher faculties of human consciousness, and the passions or affections as a lower faculty, Owen however, regularly refers to dispositions of the mind, will, and affections as parallel categories. He describes the new disposition in believers as that which "inclines and

[79] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.322.
[80] Ibid. 495 (emphasis mine).

disposeth the mind, will, and affections," showing that he sees the three faculties as having analogous functions.[81] What then are these affections?

The affections, in Owen's development, are the capacities for "fear, love, delight;" this is what Owen refers to as the "disposition of heart and soul."[82] In believers the affections are "the sensitive part of the soul" which are "implanted" with "a prevailing love" which make the soul be filled with "delight and complacency to cleave to God and his ways."[83] They are capable of sanctification, and they also are influenced by the inclination. Human affections are naturally disordered apart from the work of the Spirit, so in order to function correctly they require cleansing and training in holiness.[84] Through regeneration, the affections are enticed so that the Spirit's work "carries no more repugnancy unto our faculties than prevalent persuasion doth."[85] Likewise, the affections are changed through the "circumcision of the heart."[86] This change is accomplished through a work of the Spirit as he puts new affections into the believer's soul.[87]

In Owen's writings, "affections" figure as a rough equivalent for what Aquinas calls "the passions."[88] Owen tends to refer to the affections neutrally or even positively and to the

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[81] Ibid. 472-473; he refers to the "inclinations of our minds, wills, and affections," demonstrating that he is using all three parts of the triad in a dispositional context. See ibid. 643, 240.
[82] Ibid. 483.
[83] Ibid. 335.
[84] Ibid. 315, 427. See à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 1.320-325 and 3.5, 7-8 for a contemporary development of the importance of the affections in the triad of human faculties.
[85] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.318.
[86] Ibid. 335.
[87] Ibid.
[88] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.22.2-3, Q.24.3; 1a Q.80.2. Atkins and Williams define Aquinas' use of passions as "emotion, passive experience. A *passio* is a state of being affected by something or being acted upon, the opposite of an *action* or 'action.' Often the word refers to those experiences which we call 'emotions' which Aquinas characterises under seven main types: love, hate, joy, sorrow, fear, hope, anger." in *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 281. See Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: study of Summa Theologiae 1a2ae 22-48,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29-57 and Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature,* 241-244 for more on the specifics of how Aquinas defines the passions. In Aquinas' reception of Aristotelian ontology, passions are movements of the sensitive appetites, whereas affections that are passionless are movements of the intellectual power. As the intellectual power is the more noble of these faculties, it has a relational superiority over the sensitive appetites. For more on the distinction between passions and affections generally see Thomas Dixon, *From passions to emotions: the creation of a secular psychological category*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39-48; for a brief description of intellectual emotions see McCabe, *On Aquinas,* 73. Owen explicitly connects affections with desires generally and the principal passions specifically. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.277, 448, 239; *On the Mortification of Sin in*

passions negatively, though when he modifies the term "affections" he is usually using it negatively.[89] This usage is not universal throughout his writings, but it is certainly his normal practice.

One of Owen's most significant contributions to the idea of disposition is the way he emphasises the importance of the new disposition for fighting affections that oppose the work of the Spirit. He does not merely teach that these affections need to be moderated, he also emphasises that corrupt affections need to be replaced by godly affections. There is a need for dealing with "corrupt affections,"[90] "carnal affections,"[91] the "depravation of the will and

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*Believers,* 6.22; *On the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-Minded,* 7.446; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.25.4.

[89] Owen's comments on the necessity of believers to mortify sin are representative of his use of the term passions. "If, therefore, any are more than ordinarily subject unto the power of any corruption,—as passion, inordinate affections, love of the world, distrust of God,—unless they be constant in the exercise of those graces which are diametrically opposed unto them, they will continually suffer under the power of sin… A general apprehension that somewhat of this nature is necessary, arising from the observation of the disorder of our passions, and the exorbitancy of the lives of most in the world, is suited even to the light of nature, and was from thence variously improved by the philosophers of old. To this purpose did they give many instructions about denying and subduing the disorderly affections of the mind, conquering passions, moderating desires, and the like. But whilst their discoveries of sin rose no higher than the actual disorder they found in the affections and passions of the mind,—whilst they knew nothing of the depravation of the mind itself, and had nothing to oppose unto what they did discover but moral considerations, and those most of them notoriously influenced by vain-glory and applause,—they never attained unto any thing of the same kind with the due mortification of sin," Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.554-555. He does also refer to carnal affections and inordinate affections from time to time, as shown above. See ibid. 593. But his positive use of affections is his much more common usage. "Let, then, all tenderness of affection and bowels of compassion towards one another be put on amongst us, as becometh saints. Let pity, not envy; mercy, not malice; patience, not passion; Christ, not flesh; grace, not nature; pardon, not spite or revenge,—be our guides and companions in our conversations," Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan,*13.72. He defines the original righteousness of Adam at the first creation as containing rightly ordered affections, Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.101 Muller defines *passiones* as "*passions, emotions;* roughly synonymous with the Greek παθήματα," and *affectio* as "affection; viz., passion or desire, a disposition toward someone or something; synonymous with *passio and affectus*. Specifically, the *affectio animi,* or affection of soul, that is the faculty of desire," in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms,* 219, 29. There was a shift from the medieval use of the term "passions" to refer more generally to the movement of the sensitive appetites, to in the mid-18th century referring to those movements as "affections," and using "passions" largely for more extreme mental perturbations. See Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions,* 62-63 and Amy M. Schmitter, "Passions and Affections," in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century,* ed by Peter R. Anstey, 445-446. Owen's use of both "affections" and Aquinas' "passions" is largely consistent with this development. However modern readers may struggle with Aquinas' treatment of the passions and what exactly he means by that term, Owen would have understood "passions" and "affections" as referring more or less to the same property of the sensitive appetitive. In a more technical sense, Owen's use of "affections" is similar to what Aquinas described as "ordinate passions," and Owen's use of "passions" is similar to Aquinas' use of "inordinate emotions" or sometimes simply "passions." See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* 1a2ae, 59.5. See also David S. Sytsma, "Analysing the Affections in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 471-488 for more on the early Reformed understanding of passions and affections. See also William Fenner, *A treatise of the affections* (1642) and Edward Reynolds, *A treatise of the passions and faculties of the soul of man* (1656) for detailed treatments of the affections in contemporaneous situations to Owen's.

[90] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.33, 258, 276, 418, 485.

the affections,"[92] "disorderly affections,"[93] "sensual affections,"[94] the "disorder, irregularity, and distemper of [human] affections,"[95] the "motions of lusts that are in the flesh; the irregular actings of affections, in their inordinate risings up to their objects,"[96] and the necessity for "the mortification of corrupt lusts and affections."[97] This is not to say that Owen's treatment of affections is always or even usually negative, but he does have a strong view of the impact of sin on human affections. Sin is expressed not just in thought and will, but also in how humans desire, feel, and emote. But there is also a need for good affections as well.

Following the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, the believer is made "good and holy," with the result of a "subsequent change of affections and amendment of life."[98] Owen points out that this work affects the whole person, all of one's faculties, yet he distinctly emphasises the result on the affections as well. Rightly ordered affections replace disordered affections. "But saving grace fills up the affections with spiritual things, fills the soul with spiritual love, joy, and delight, and exerciseth all other affections about their proper objects."[99] The affections themselves are renewed and enabled to function properly.[100] The object of the affections has changed. Where previously the affections were drawn only through natural or even carnal desires, now they are set upon things which are good and bring glory to God, "even God himself."[101] The Holy Spirit works directly on human affections,

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[91] Ibid. 448, 451, 539.
[92] Ibid. 244.
[93] Ibid. 451, 555, 558.
[94] Ibid. 275.
[95] Ibid. 437.
[96] Ibid. 462; see also 539 and 554.
[97] Ibid. 482.
[98] Ibid. 236-237.
[99] Ibid. 240.
[100] Ibid. 239-240.
[101] "There is a proposal unto the wills and affections of men in the things so assented unto, on the one hand as good, amiable, and excellent, wherein the chiefest good, happiness, and utmost end of our natures are comprised, to be pursued and attained; and on the other of things evil and terrible, the utmost evil that our nature is obnoxious unto, to be avoided: for this is urged on them, that to comply with the will of God in the proposals of the gospel, to conform thereunto, to do what he requires, to turn from sin unto him, is good unto men, best for them,—assuredly attended with present satisfaction and future glory. And therein is also proposed the most

moulding them through enticement to what is beautiful.[102] All that Owen previously described as corrupt affections and their impact "is cured by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost in the rectifying and renovation of our natures. He giveth a new understanding, a new heart, new affections, renewing the whole soul into the image of God."[103] The Holy Spirit both does this work of renewal and provides the "inward labouring and spiritual working of the sanctified heart and affections towards God; wherein consist those 'groanings that cannot be uttered,' Rom. 8:26."[104] The Spirit, using the faith of the believer as a sort of eye, shows believers the "truth, reality, subsistence, power, and efficacy of spiritual, mysterious things" in a way that has a profound impact on their affections.[105]

The affections, then, are not merely passive, though they can have a passive role as a response to something. Rather they point the will and the mind in the direction they are meant to go. The mind apprehends what is good, the will is directed towards what is good, and the affections sense or feel what is good. Natural affections are unreliable guides that are not able to properly direct movement towards an appropriate goal. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in the new disposition, natural affections are both unpredictable and volatile.

The affections are a significant focus on the Holy Spirit's work of renovation through the new disposition. Not only does Owen repeatedly list the affections with the mind, the will, the understanding, and the conscience, he also takes special attention to emphasise specifically how the affections are changed and that they are indeed a subject of the Spirit's work of renewal. This means, for Owen, that any full discussion of disposition needs to include comment on its impact on the affections. Throughout his written works Owen gives different levels of specificity to how exactly the disposition results in a change of the

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noble object for our affections, even God himself, as a friend, as reconciled unto us in Christ; and that in a way suited unto his holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and goodness, which we have nothing to oppose unto nor to lay in the balance against." Ibid. 305.

[102] Ibid. 318.

[103] Ibid. 437.

[104] Ibid. 439.

[105] Ibid.

affections.[106] Yet the point is the same: the Holy Spirit renews the whole person of the believer through the new disposition. This disposition results in a change in all the faculties of the human soul: mind, will, and affections.

**Owen's Simplification of Ontology**

Though Owen clearly has a scholastic ontology behind his understanding of how humans operate, he presents a simplification of that ontology in his theological works. Aquinas' structure is visible in the background of Owen's writing, but what Owen emphasises is a much less complicated framework. Despite this simplified terminology in Owen's account of the soul, he is surprisingly able to keep many of Aquinas' key emphases on faculty psychology in his works. There are two main ways that Owen's treatment of faculties of the soul builds on Aquinas' development.

First, Owen collapses the more complicated Aristotelian faculty psychology into the triad of mind, will, and affections. Owen draws his triad of faculties from a summarised Thomist ontology, but he omits the parts of this psychology that do not apply to his topic. Rather than taking the whole of Aquinas' understanding of the powers of the soul as a cohesive unit, Owen instead picks out the pieces that are the most relevant to his theological project, and then puts them in a more approachable format.

What Owen describes as the impact of the disposition on the triad fits with what we commonly experience. His regular use of the terms mind, will, and affection, or some similar combination emphasises the thinking, willing, and feeling faculties of human nature. We think, we choose, and we feel. This ontology helpfully explains daily practice. We may not always be aware of which faculty is driving our response to a given situation in the moment,

[106] In *Pneumatologia* this change is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, though Owen also speaks of beholding Christ as a means of awakening faith and resulting in growth in holiness. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.511. See also *A Treatise on the Dominion of Sin and Grace*, 7.528. In *The Mortification of Sin in Believers* the affections are changed as a result of the believer's labour to fight against sin, though this is also because of the Spirit's work as well. See Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.16-20.

but we can often after the fact, and fairly easily, distinguish among these three faculties. Owen is describing faculty psychology in an accessible fashion, and that helps make his development of the concept of disposition more approachable.

This simplification of Aquinas' ontology to Owen's triad is readily grasped as referring to the whole human soul. That is the main point Owen wants to emphasise in his concept of disposition. He rarely leaves out any one of these three components. They are a set; they belong together. Though there is a voluntarist flavour to Owen's ontology which borrows, at least in part, from William Ames, he does not allow it to come at the expense at a similar emphasis on the mind and the affections.[107] Owen repeatedly insists that the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying his people consists in a complete work, one in which the whole human nature, mind, will, and affections, is changed.[108] The disposition works on all the faculties of a person, mind, will, and affections. Owen is clear that the affections are every bit as responsible for human sin as are the faculties of mind and will.[109] This is also true of Owen's understanding of spiritual growth as well. One does not grow spiritually only in the will or the mind, without also growing in the affections. Both in vice and in virtue, the whole person is involved: mind, will, and affections. The "whole soul" is changed through the work of the Holy Spirit.[110]

The idea of disposition is one that encompasses all these different aspects of human consciousness. We do not have to parse exactly how a disposition impacts the different faculties in a specific instance or at which point which faculty is being impacted. In fact, to

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[107] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.502; William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (1642), 197-198. See also John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 69-71. Owen points to the importance of the mind, will, and affections all being involved in the new disposition, and his comment on moral dispositions having their seat in the will points to the need for distinctly Christian dispositions, that is, rightly purposed dispositions over and above naturally acquired dispositions, rather than making Owen's understanding of dispositions pre-eminently voluntaristic. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.498-504.

[108] Ibid. 468–469. Owen shortly thereafter emphasises again that the supernaturally infused disposition works directly on all three faculties: "according to the nature of all habits, it inclines and disposeth the mind, will, and affections," Ibid. 472-473.

[109] Ibid. 297-298.

[110] Ibid. 332.

do so is not really possible; we are far more complex and intertwined in our thinking and feeling than that, and we are rarely that aware of ourselves. Yet this disposition does have an impact on everything about how a person feels, wills, thinks, desires, and acts. It stands behind all these faculties. Owen is trying to explain how the work of sanctification impacts the complete human, the entirety of who one is. The "renovation of our whole persons" takes place through a dispositional change in "the whole soul and body, or the entire nature, of every believing person."[111] It is precisely this whole person aspect of Owen's treatment of the Spirit's work of sanctification that Owen believes is so important in the new disposition. Owen's use of the triad in place of Aquinas' psychological terminology aids him in this explanation.

Second, Owen frequently simplifies the terminology he uses when he describes these faculties. Owen does use the standard scholastic nomenclature for these specific faculties, their dispositions, and their acts, but neither as frequently nor as consistently as one might have expected.[112] Considering his reliance on both Aristotle and Aquinas for these concepts, he makes very little of the distinction between powers and appetites. Having been trained in Thomist ontology, Owen was clearly aware of Aquinas' distinctions in this matter, and he

[111] Ibid. 417.

[112] Faculties and powers are synonyms for Owen as for Aquinas, and Owen uses them interchangeably. Owen uses the term "appetite" largely as a synonym for a general sort of desire rather than to refer to a specific property of one of the powers of the soul. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.556, 642, 12.154; *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4.583-602. Though he does refer to the will as an appetite, it is not his regular pattern, *Pneumatologia*, 3.309, 339; *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ,* 10.427; *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed,* 11.457. He describes the difference between desires of the "mind" and the "sensual appetite," in *The Nature, Power, Prevalency, and Deceit of Indwelling Sin,* 6.189, and between the will and the appetite of the affections, 6.254, but this is largely to define what Owen sees as scripture referring to the desires of the "flesh." He references the "irascible appetite" or "irascible faculty" only twice in his works, but he does not use either of these references in the same way. See *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,* 4.361; *Pneumatologia*, 3.52. Though Owen does regularly make use of the term "concupiscence" and its related cognates, he uses these terms as synonyms for evil desire rather than in a context of metaphysical distinctions between aspects of human consciousness, whereas concupiscence in Aquinas is not an inherently sinful category. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.342, 448-450; *The Nature, Power, Prevalency, and Deceit of Indwelling Sin,* 6.200; *On the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 7.411; *Sermons*, 9.349, 382; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.30.3. Owen's use of "affections" for to refer to both "passions" and the appetite which produces them is not unique in his time. See Sytsma, "Analysing the Affections in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* 473 for more on the use of these faculties in earlier reformed theology. For more on the use of faculty psychology among the reformers and the reformed orthodox see Muller, *PRRD*, 1.355-359.

demonstrates throughout his writings that this framework was behind his understanding of human nature. In fact, sometimes his usage stands in noticeable contradiction to Thomist ontology. Nowhere is this more evident than in his concept of the affections. Owen describes dispositions or inclinations of the affections. Now if the affections are equated with the sensitive appetites, then they are the subjects of dispositions as are the mind and the will. If, however, the affections are equated with the passions, then, properly speaking, they are not the subjects of dispositions, for passions do not have dispositions. Owen's use of affections is frequently inconsistent with this distinction, as he uses affections both in place of the passions and in place of the sensitive appetites, sometimes even switching between these distinctions without signalling that he is doing so.[113]

This inconsistency between Aquinas' and Owen's terminology may be carelessness on Owen's part, as at times Owen is neither consistent nor precise in his writing. Owen's combining of the sensitive appetite with the passions is technically imprecise; they are not the same thing, and it leads to a sort of incoherence in Owen's treatment of the affections if one does not understand what he's doing. How can Owen emphasise a disposition of the emotions? Such terminology does not fit with Thomist ontology. When one remembers that Owen sometimes refers to the affections as the sensitive appetite which produces the affections or passions rather than as the passions themselves it becomes clear.

In spite of these limitations, Owen's simplification has significant benefits that commend his approach. In fact, Owen's imprecision may actually turn out as a net gain for him, because his usage fits better than Aquinas' with ordinary human experience.[114] Owen's usage could be a sensitivity to the fact that most people do not distinguish between their emotions and the source of their emotions.[115] For example, when we feel love for something,

[113] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.168, 225, 240, 350, 483,
[114] Owen references his own experience as standing behind his treatment of the mind and affections in *Of the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 7.263.
[115] McCabe points out that Aquinas was not unaware of this complexity, in *On Aquinas,* 79-80.

we don't usually distinguish which faculty or power of the soul is responsible for that feeling of love. We simply are aware we love it. Does it change our love for us to know that our reason motivates our will which then activates our affections towards whatever that something is? Likely not, unless through thinking about different faculties and appetites we become distracted from our love for whatever-it-is in the first place. Are we even aware that this is the psychological process we undergo through the experience of love? Again, usually we are not. We simply know that, as we say today even if it were not how Aquinas or Owen would have said it, we *feel* a sort of love for something; we may not even know why. Owen's simplification of the vocabulary of ontology fits with this common experience.

Aquinas' ontology, while technically precise and often psychologically valid, is hardly intuitive. That is not to argue that is it not useful; a technical vocabulary is often necessary for many concepts whether or not we use that vocabulary daily. Medical terminology comes to mind as an example. But sometime a more technical approach can obscure the concept for the average reader. Owen's purpose wasn't to provide an in-depth examination of the powers of the soul; Aquinas had already written that book. Owen's goal was to explain the process of dispositional change in believers through the work of the Holy Spirit. Few would argue that Owen's writings on any subject are intuitive, as his writings have long had a reputation for being cumbersome, but this simplification of Aquinas' ontology may be one area where Owen is attempting to meet his readers halfway.

Now, as mentioned previously, Owen writes of the affections as if they are a parallel faculty to the mind and the will.[116] Aquinas and Aristotle held that the affections were a subordinate faculty to the mind and the will, and Owen technically maintains this categorisation. Yet his regular pattern of usage suggests he wants his readers to understand a certain correspondence between all three faculties of the triad. Aristotle, Aquinas, and Owen

[116] See Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 5.482; *Pneumatologia*, 3.288, 309, 469, 4.370.

all agree that the passions can lead the mind and the will astray.[117] Owen and Aquinas, however, see the problem as deeper than merely having disordered passions. The affections are prone to desire created things rather than the Creator. The depravation of this faculty is such that it makes serious opposition to efforts at reformation. Thus, the solution for both Aquinas and for Owen is much more radical than merely reordering the affections: the affections themselves need to be transformed, and both new objects for and sorts of affections need to be instilled.

Owen's use of dispositions of the affections is a key point of Aquinas' development of disposition that is essential to understanding Owen's later application of dispositions to pastoral ministry. Robert Miner points out that Aquinas "displays no tendency to exalt reason by denigrating the passions, or to exalt the passions by condemning the rule of reason."[118] Both intellect and affections are critical components of human functionality in Aquinas' development, and Owen retains this crucial emphasis. A flourishing human is one in whom the passions or affections and reason rightly function in relation to each other. Despite Aquinas' explanation of the passions seeming to remove moral agency from humans on account of their passions, he still puts a moral responsibility on human beings for the various attendant circumstances and dispositions that result in their passions.[119] Owen's simplification of Aquinas' terminology on the passion allows him to emphasise both the importance of the affections themselves and their responsiveness to command.[120]

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[117] Though Owen does complain about "the philosophers of old" and their evaluation of the problem: "To this purpose did they give many instructions about denying and subduing the disorderly affections of the mind, conquering passions, moderating desires, and the like. But whilst their discoveries of sin rose no higher than the actual disorder they found in the affections and passions of the mind,—whilst they knew nothing of the depravation of the mind itself, and had nothing to oppose unto what they did discover but moral considerations, and those most of them notoriously influenced by vain-glory and applause,—they never attained unto any thing of the same kind with the due mortification of sin." Ibid. 555.

[118] Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 90.

[119] Aquinas describes moral agency regarding the passions as analogous to moral agency in drunkenness. Even if one experiences passions that are uncontrolled by reason, there may circumstances for which humans are responsible which led to their unreasonable passions. See *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.77.7; Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions,* 100-108.

[120] See Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: a psychology of Christian virtues,* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2007), 22- 31.

The importance with which Owen understands the work of the Holy Spirit on the affections points to the fact that for Owen, the affections are as equally impacted by the new disposition as are the mind and the will. This will have a profound impact on his development of the doctrine of sanctification as well as his discussion of pastoral practice.[121] Disposition, in Owen's development, is a quality that impacts all the faculties of a human. This is where Owen's use of the triad of powers is important. Mind, will, and affections are all subject to disorder and corruption from the fall, but through the Spirit's work they are all renewed so that they incline the believer towards God. To understand what in humanity is given an inclination towards God, one needs to examine the faculties of mind, will, and affections as well as their concomitant dispositions.

**Conclusion**

Disposition in Owen's development is a whole-person inclination. It is produced by the Holy Spirit, but it works through the entirety of human nature. Every aspect of the soul is impacted by this disposition.

One of the keys aspects of disposition that Owen repeatedly highlights is the whole-person nature of this disposition. Owen also gives a definition of this disposition at the end of his treatment.

> That there is in the minds, wills, and affections of all believers, a meetness, fitness, readiness, and habitual disposition unto the performance of all acts of obedience towards God, all duties of piety, charity, and righteousness, that are required of them; and hereby are they internally and habitually distinguished from them that are not so… This power and disposition is wrought and preserved in them by the Holy Ghost.[122]

[121] In point of fact, it may actually work the opposite way. Owen's doctrine of sanctification was developed in print well over a decade before he published *Pneumatologia*. Though chronologically Owen worked on the idea of sanctification prior to his more full elaboration of disposition, conceptually, the idea of disposition stands behind Owen's work on sanctification. It is clear in Owen's writings on the doctrine of sanctification that his idea of the Holy Spirit infusing a new disposition into the believer to instil a change in the mind, will, and affections is already well established in his thought even before he had published his work on the Holy Spirit and the new disposition.

[122] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.529; see 526 as well.

Owen's multiplication of terms to describe what he writes about is a common feature of his writing, and indeed, of the times in which he wrote. Yet there is a rhetorical purpose to what he does as well.

This impact of the disposition on the affections is the beginning of the work of disposition on the faculties of a person in that it instils "a "holy inclinations of the heart unto spiritual obedience."[123] Through the work of regeneration the Spirit takes away the sinful aspects of the old disposition and "fills us with holy spiritual love, joy, fear, and delight, not changing the being of our affections, but sanctifying and guiding them by the principle of saving light and knowledge before described, and uniting them unto their proper object in a due manner."[124] The Spirit accomplishes a dispositional change, and the whole triad is renewed as a result. Where before there was corruption and alienation from God, now there is renewal and an inclination toward God. Where before there was an inability to do anything pleasing to God, now believers are enabled to fulfil what Owen calls gospel obedience. Where before there was a habitual pattern of sin, now there is a disposition towards holiness.

Owen writes about something that is both much more basic in our humanity yet also much more comprehensive than any single term can express in our own contemporary English. This seems to be part of the reason that Owen himself also uses so many different terms to express himself. The disposition does not simply impact one's feelings, or one's thoughts, or one's motivations, or one's desires. It changes all these faculties both individually and in their interactions with each other. The whole person is impacted by this radically new reorientation. Everything about who and what a person is is fundamentally transformed. When Owen writes of sanctification and change in humanity, he is addressing a disposition and each of the faculties the disposition impacts, rather than simply actions. Actions follow from the character of the disposition, but dispositions are a deeper category

[123] Ibid. 483.
[124] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.335.

for human psychology than actions. Owen wants to address the core of how the Holy Spirit functions upon the nature of believers.

Owen wants his readers to be able to see the whole way around this idea. In his view, the best way to do that is to use a glut of similar terms and take the overlapping ideas that emerge from these terms. So, we see him writing of "minds, wills, and affections," "meetness, fitness, readiness, and habitual disposition," and "piety, charity, and righteousness." In all three instances Owen uses words that are far more than synonyms. In fact, in all three of these examples, it would be a grave mistake to equate the terms with each other as if they were the same. The mind, the will, and the affections are three distinct faculties in humans. Piety, charity, and righteousness refer to three separate duties enjoined on the Christian. But in all three examples, Owen can to refer to something much bigger than he could describe with a single concept by his use of multiple similar but distinct terms.

These three pieces of human consciousness form a triad of faculties that Owen regularly uses together. Though Owen does not explain his view of human ontology in nearly as complicated and systematic a manner as does Aquinas, we know Owen is working within the same rough framework as Aquinas on matters such as these. Owen's ontology is expressed in a rather simplified form when considered next to Aquinas. Yet there is much overlap. The importance of this triad in understanding how and why we function the way we do is a key similarity between Owen and Aquinas.

Owen's use of the category of disposition shows the level of complexity in his understanding of human nature. In many ways, Owen was not simply writing theology; he was also writing philosophy and psychology. In fact, to Owen these disciplines were all intertwined. Rather than being three distinct disciplines, Owen believes that the task of the pastor is to combine all three of these areas of emphasis as a part of any theological project.

Any holistic pastoral theology deals with the "care of souls," and part of caring for the whole soul is understanding the different faculties of that soul.[125]

Owen emphasises that through Adam's first sin God's image in humanity has been lost as to its original and glorious splendour.[126] That does not mean that the triad of mind, will, and affections is wholly lost, but it has been spoiled and rendered incapable of proper function. The whole person is corrupted through that fall, for "the spring and fountain of all the pollution of sin lies in the depravation of the faculties of our natures, which ensued on the loss of the image of God."[127] Yet despite this loss, God "renews [our natural faculties] again by his grace…. He giveth a new understanding, a new heart, new affections, renewing the whole soul into the image of God."[128] Owen points out that everything about a person is changed by the Spirit's work. Every faculty is given a new perspective, a new lens through which to experience life. The Spirit's work in the new disposition is how God renews his image in his people.

[125] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.43.
[126] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.450.
[127] Ibid. 436.
[128] Ibid. 436-437.

## Chapter 4 – Disposition: The Divine Initiative

Dispositions are a key aspect of Owen's ontology of human nature, but renewed dispositions have their fundamental source not in humanity but in God. As Owen emphasises that the Holy Spirit is the divine agent principally responsible for the work of dispositions in believers, he also explains that believers only receive new dispositions as a result of a work of infusion by the Holy Spirit. Renewal in the triad of human nature can only take place through a divine interaction with humanity, and it is only following a supernatural renewal of human faculties that believers can be properly inclined towards God. Though Owen still depends heavily on Aquinas, this chapter is where Owen's distinctly Reformed development of the concept of disposition is most clearly evident. It is also where the most problematic aspects of Owen's concept of disposition arise. In Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's divine work on human dispositions, he risks the human response in sanctification being eclipsed by divine power. I will explore the source, reason, means, timing, and duration of disposition in Owen's theology, and then I will offer some evaluation and critique of Owen's development.

### Humanity Naturally Indisposed

The concept of regeneration leads to the question of why regeneration is needed in the first place.[1] Owen's development of this idea highlights the divine role of the Holy Spirit in human dispositions, but it also points to a significant problem on the human side of things as well. Humanity is naturally indisposed to this divinely infused disposition. In Owen's theology, fallen humanity is unable to achieve righteousness or virtue on its own because of a natural aversion to both God and godliness.[2] This aversion is both a lack of desire and lack of

[1] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.9.

[2] For more on the usual Puritan understanding of sin in the unregenerate see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 208-213. They summarise the topic by stating, "In sum, the Puritans were deeply aware of the guilt and the pollution of Adam's sin. Adam's transgression was something that affected the unregenerate portion of

ability to pursue anything that God has commanded or to avoid anything that God has forbidden.

Owen describes the impact that the fall into sin has upon humanity. Notice how he emphasises the corruption of sin on the whole triad of human nature.

> In the declaration of the state of corrupted nature after the fall, and before the reparation of it by the grace of Jesus Christ,—that is, the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit,—the Scripture principally insists on three things:—1. The corruption and depravation of the mind; which it calls by the name of darkness and blindness, with the consequents of vanity, ignorance, and folly. 2. The depravation of the will and affections; which it expresseth several ways, as by weakness or impotency, and stubbornness or obstinacy. 3. By the general name of death, extended to the condition of the whole soul.[3]

The fall corrupts the entirety of human nature. All human beings "by nature, not enlightened, not renewed in their minds by the saving, effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, are in a state of darkness and blindness with respect unto God and spiritual things," and they have become corrupted by the fall, even to the level of each faculty of the triad.[4] Owen describes human dispositions apart from the Spirit's work of regeneration as "perverse and depraved."[5] Fallen humanity is unable to see properly that which is good and true. The mind, the heart, and the understanding are broken. In Owen's theology, the whole person has become corrupted and completely unable to serve God in one's own strength.[6]

Owen refers to this fallen nature as the product of "corruption and depravation**."**[7] Humanity needs a new nature infused into it through regeneration because the old nature is corrupt and broken. This emphasis was common to the Reformed Orthodox, following a

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the human race but also the regenerate, albeit in different ways or to different degrees," in *A Puritan Theology*, 215.

[3] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.244. This depravation entails far more than simply doing that which is wrong. It is also the corruption of the ability to understand what is right. "That, by reason of that vice, corruption, or depravation of the minds of all unregenerate men, which the Scripture calls darkness and blindness, they are not able of themselves, by their own reasons and understandings, however exercised and improved, to discern, receive, understand, or believe savingly, spiritual things, or the mystery of the gospel, when and as they are outwardly revealed unto them, without an effectual, powerful work of the Holy Spirit, creating, or by his almighty power inducing, a new saving light into them." Ibid. 248–249.

[4] Ibid. 244.

[5] Ibid. 255.

[6] Ibid. 250-253.

[7] Ibid. 244, 257, 272, 328.

thoroughly Augustinian view of sin.[8] Something good is broken and lost through sin. In the place where there ought to be moral uprightness, there is instead an inability of the soul to pursue righteousness. "There is in unregenerate men a natural impotency, through the immediate depravation of the faculties of the mind or understanding, whereby a natural man is absolutely unable, without an especial renovation by the Holy Ghost, to discern spiritual things in a saving manner."[9] Fallen humanity is unable even to reach for God.

Not only is something good lost and broken, now because of the fall there is no longer an inclination towards what is good. In the place of humanity's moral upright state at the original creation there is now an indisposition to the things of God. The triad of mind, will, and affections is subject to this anti-disposition, whereby the whole human nature is now opposed to that which is good. Owen describes this as both a "moral impotency" and an actual deliberate choice to "always and unchangeably reject and refuse" the preaching of the gospel.[10] This indisposition in humanity results in a lack of "active power" or "disposition in itself towards" the things of God.[11] Humanity is no longer capable of either desiring or moving toward God on its own. The mind no longer has the ability to receive spiritual truth, nor can the will choose or the affections desire it, apart from a renewing work of God's grace upon human nature.

Owen is here simply building upon the theology already accepted by the reformed churches of his day. The Savoy Declaration, which Owen adapted for Congregational purposes from the Westminster Confession of Faith, states this about the human condition:

> By this sin [Adam and Eve], and we in them, fell from original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root, and by God's appointment

[8] Stephen Charnock similarly describes this natural state of humanity in need of regeneration as "total moral unfitness," in *A Discourse on the Efficient of Regeneration,* in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock, B.D.*. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), 3.174.
[9] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.266–267.
[10] Ibid. 267.
[11] Ibid. 252. Aquinas also describes original sin as a disposition towards corruption. See *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.82.1, also Q.85.

> standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.[12]

"[U]tterly indisposed" means the human disposition works against the purposes of a good and gracious disposition, that is, against God's design for humanity. This indisposition flows as a consequence of unbelief. [13] Humanity has lost any ability to work a change in the disposition on its own.[14]

The need for a new disposition through regeneration implies the corruption and inadequacy of the old disposition, "for if man be not originally corrupted and polluted, if his nature be not depraved, if it be not possessed by, and under the power of, evil dispositions and inclinations, it is certain that he stands in no need of an inward spiritual renovation of it."[15] In Owen's theology, not only is the scripture clear on the subject of human sin, but its emphasis on regeneration also necessitates an understanding of depravation and indisposition.

Owen also explores another significant reason why humanity is indisposed to righteousness. Fallen humanity is under the curse of spiritual death.[16] Not only has humanity lost original righteousness through the fall and become indisposed towards God, but now there is also the presence of a corrupt disposition as well. There is not merely an absence of original righteousness, now there is also a presence of an actual wickedness and antipathy to righteousness as well. Humanity possess dispositions that point them away from God. This inverse of a gracious disposition, what Owen calls a "depraved habit," is a principle of

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[12] *1658 Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*, 6.2-4.
[13] Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,* 5.207.
[14] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.267.
[15] Ibid. 224.
[16] "ANOTHER description that the Scripture gives of unregenerate men, as to their state and condition, is, that they are spiritually dead; and hence, in like manner, it follows that there is a necessity of an internal, powerful, effectual work of the Holy Ghost on the souls of men, to deliver them out of this state and condition by regeneration. And this principally respects their wills and affections, as the darkness and blindness before described doth their minds and understandings. There is a spiritual life whereby men live unto God; this they being strangers unto and alienated from, are spiritually dead." Ibid. 282. Spiritual death is the primary reason à Brakel's focuses on in his article on regeneration; he does not emphasise either depravation or corruption. See *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.233-260

spiritual death in those who are unregenerate.[17] Just as the body dies, so can the soul. Owen describes this separation of the body from the "principle of life" in physical death as a comparison of what happens to the soul through spiritual death.[18] The corruption of sin results in death in the souls of humans who have not been regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit. They have been removed from the principle and source of life because of sin.

Spiritual death, then, is a "privation of a principle of spiritual life, namely, of…a power of living unto God according to the covenant of works; and a negation of that which we have by Christ, or a power of living unto God according to the tenor of the covenant of grace."[19] It is "an actual cessation of all vital acts. From this defect of power, or the want of a principle of spiritual life, it is that men in the state of nature can perform no vital act of spiritual obedience,—nothing that is spiritually good, or saving, or acceptable with God."[20] Spiritual death is a consequence of having fallen from original righteousness.

If there is to be a good and gracious disposition in humanity, it must come from the work of the Holy Spirit. If believers are to be sanctified, then they must first be regenerated. "And this regeneration is the head, fountain, or beginning of our sanctification, virtually comprising the whole in itself, as will afterward appear."[21] This disposition must necessarily begin with God; humanity has no power to effect it. The state of humanity after the fall is corruption and depravation, indisposition and spiritual death. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to supernaturally renew a fallen nature. How does this happen? Owen's solution is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's life-giving work through regeneration.

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[17] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.270. See also Charnock's *The Efficient of Regeneration,* in *Works*, 3.173-177.
[18] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.284.
[19] Ibid. 287. Owen uses the concept of "privation" in *Pneumatologia* to describe not sin but spiritual death. For a description of sin itself as privation see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.75.1. Owen's one reference to a "moral privation" refers to the result of sin rather than its cause. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.252.
[20] Ibid. 291.
[21] Ibid. 299.

**Dispositions Implanted through Regeneration**

Owen defines the process of regeneration as that which is responsible for working a new disposition, "a divine principle, such a gracious, supernatural habit," in those "that are born again."[22] Regeneration is a "renovation of this image of God in us," the "implantation of a new principle of spiritual life," and "a life unto God in repentance, faith, and obedience, or universal holiness."[23] He further explains regeneration as

> the infusion of a new, real, spiritual principle into the soul and its faculties, of spiritual life, light, holiness, and righteousness, disposed unto and suited for the destruction or expulsion of a contrary, inbred, habitual principle of sin and enmity against God, enabling unto all acts of holy obedience, and so in order of nature antecedent unto them.[24]

Regeneration is the means by which the Holy Spirit renews the entirety of human nature and accomplishes sanctification in the believer to suit the believer for the presence of God.

Owen's terminology regarding the doctrine of regeneration and its conceptual limits is rather confusing. He regularly uses terms such as regeneration, conversion, renovation, and sanctification interchangeably rather than with specific and precise definitions, though it is clear that all of these terms do have distinct nuances.[25] Owen was hardly unique in this, as in his day there was a fluid use of these terms in the writings of the Reformed Orthodox.[26] Owen

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[22] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.469. Whereas Owen spends a significant portion of text describing what regeneration is and why is it necessary, à Brakel puts more emphasis on what regeneration looks like in the one being regenerated and how the work of regeneration is perceived by the elect. See *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.338-260. There is a great deal of conceptual overlap between Owen's treatment of regeneration and that of Thomas Goodwin in *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Our Salvation,* passim.

[23] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.330.

[24] Ibid. 218–219.

[25] See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3.579-585; 4.55-56, 70, 76, 80. Both W. G. T. Shedd and Louis Berkhof complain that the early Reformed Orthodox use of regeneration-related terms was imprecise and problematic. See Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1889), 2.491-492, and Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 465-479. This distaste for the broader usage of the concept of regeneration among reformed theologians persists to the present day. See John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 940-946. For a current treatment of regeneration that is sensitive to these distinctions and sees the usefulness of both the broad and restricted ways of referring to regeneration, see Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 658-668. Cleveland seems to understand these terms as distinct concepts in Owen's theology, in *Thomism in John Owen,* 91-92.

[26] à Brakel points out that this multifaceted use of regeneration-related terms stems from the way scripture refers to the topic, though he also clearly distinguishes between conversion and regeneration, in *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.233. See also Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 15.5-6. For other developments of

demonstrates a preference for the terms regeneration or conversion when referring to the Holy Spirit's renewing activity, and he routinely uses these terms synonymously.[27] He sometimes describes regeneration as a single point in time, but he more frequently refers to it as the whole process by which a believer is renovated and sanctified.[28] Conversion can also, rather than being a precise synonym for regeneration, refer to the whole of the process prior to regeneration by which the Holy Spirit leads a person to the point of repentance.[29]

What then, is the relationship between regeneration and the new disposition in Owen's theology? The Holy Spirit's work of regeneration is necessary for believers to be able to receive a new disposition, and this work points to the ongoing or continuous nature of dispositional change that flows from regeneration. Francis Turretin distinguishes between both an active and passive conversion as a result of the Spirit's work, and both are necessary in order for humanity to function as God intends.[30] Owen picks up the same theme by pointing to passive conversion as the beginning of the Spirit's renovating work in believers.[31] This is meant to be nothing novel by way of theological development, yet Owen sees it as

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the concept of regeneration contemporary to Owen see George Swinnock's *The door of salvation opened by the key of regeneration* (1661 [1660]) and Charnock's *Discourses* on regeneration in *Works* vol.3.

[27] The term "new birth" is used only eight times in *Pneumatologia*, whereas "conversion" and "regeneration" are linked together over fifty times in *Pneumatologia*. Owen rarely connects regeneration explicitly with the idea of "washing." His quotations of Titus 3.5 may be the only instances where he does. "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" Titus 3.4-5, NRSV. See *Pneumatologia*, 3.209, 434, 458. Owen rarely even uses the language of washing apart from direct scriptural quotations. The concept of washing comes up most often in his chapters on the defilement and filth of sin, but even then, the language is mostly scriptural citations. See ibid. 422-467.

[28] "The work of regeneration is instantaneous, consisting in one single creating act." Ibid. 387; "It is the work of regeneration, with respect both to its foundation and progress, that is here described." Ibid. 221; also 57, 209, 300, 464, 491. Owen's predominant emphasis on regeneration is that it is a process. In that respect, the whole Christian life is a progression of the Spirit's regenerat*ing* power in believers rather than act solely consisting of "changing the state of the human soul." See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen,* 88-89. Regeneration "does not remain static" not because regeneration only precedes something else that follows on in Owen's theology, namely sanctification, rather regeneration is itself the means by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies and renews his people. *Thomism in John Owen,* 100.

[29] See Owen's chapter on the conversion of Augustine in *Pneumatologia*, 3.337-366.

[30] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 15.4.13.

[31] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10.133-135. Owen's description of human response to the infusion of grace is strikingly similar to Aquinas' fourfold effect of infused grace in *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.113.8.

important to emphasise.[32] Believers cannot receive a new disposition until their natures have been renewed. Human nature after the fall, in Owen's theology, is not a blank canvas ready to receive the artist's impression. Rather it is spoiled and ruined. For the Spirit to be able to sanctify a person, a work of restoration must take place to enable human nature to function according to God's design. What is it that is regenerated? The soul and human nature. The Spirit's work takes fallen humanity in both its essence and powers, transforms it, and gives it new direction and ability. Regeneration is inescapably dispositional in Owen's theology in that it not only results in an infused disposition, it also strengthens and aims that disposition.

But the Spirit's work in regenerating human dispositions is not a once and done work. The Spirit begins regeneration through implanting new dispositions to human nature, but he also continues this work through a regular renewal of the human nature through these dispositions as well. Notice the way Owen describes the impact of the work of regeneration: he refers to a principle, a disposing effect, a habitual principle, and a reparation of an image, all things which point to both a new and given potentiality or change in ability and an ongoing nature of change.[33] Once a person undergoes *regeneration*, then the process of *regenerating* begins. In conjunction with his fluid use of terms, Owen puts his main treatment of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration under the topics of both conversion and sanctification. Book III of *Pneumatologia* catalogues the various ways the Spirit works in giving those who are spiritually dead new life in Christ. Owen explains in Books IV and V of *Pneumatologia* that regeneration also includes the later work of renovation, the ongoing and continual process by which the Holy Spirit slowly but consistently works in believers to remove from them the lingering corruption of sin. Regeneration rather than justification is the

[32] Owen here sees himself as continuing in the same exegetical and interpretive tradition as the early church fathers and the reformers on the subject of regeneration. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.300-301.
[33] Ibid. 469.

source of sanctification in Owen's theology.[34] Justification is a one-time resolution of the believer's account with God, a matter of legal status before God, but regeneration reaches down into the core of human nature by beginning the life-long progression of sanctification. As the dispositional change impacts the whole human nature, Owen also elaborates the effect that regeneration has upon the mind, the will, and the affections.

> The work itself wrought is our regeneration. I have proved before that this consists in a new, spiritual, supernatural, vital principle or habit of grace, infused into the soul, the mind, will, and affections, by the power of the Holy Spirit, disposing and enabling them in whom it is unto spiritual, supernatural, vital acts of faith and obedience.[35]

Regeneration is the specific and antecedent work of the Spirit that results in the whole soul being transformed; it both restores human nature so change can take place and results in a fundamental changing of human nature. The Spirit's work of renewal is responsible for giving new dispositions in place of old and flawed dispositions.

Because of what regeneration accomplishes in believers, Owen sees it as necessary to carefully distinguish between regeneration and baptism. He purposefully distances himself from what he saw as the mechanistic or "*ex opere operato*" position of the Roman Catholic understanding of the relationship between baptism and regeneration, whereas he distinguishes between the "efficient cause" or "nature" of regeneration and the "means and evidences or pledges" which are the "outward signs and tokens" of regeneration in baptism.[36] Baptism, for

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[34] Notice Owen's language of process: "IN the regeneration or conversion of God's elect, the nature and manner whereof we have before described, consists the second part of the work of the Holy Spirit, in order unto the *completing and perfecting* of the new creation… Nor doth he leave this work in that beginning of it whereof we have treated, but unto him also it belongs *to continue it, to preserve it, and to carry it on to perfection*; and this he doth in our sanctification, whose nature and effects we are in the next place to inquire into." Ibid. 366–367 (emphasis mine).

[35] Ibid. 329.

[36] Ibid. 216, 434-436; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 19.19.1-8. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, Q.69 and 1a2ae, Q.113, and the Council of Trent, session 7, on the sacraments in general and on baptism, for the relationship between baptism, the infusion of grace, and the remission of sins. Beeke and Jones point to the Roman Catholic dependence upon baptismal regeneration as one of the key motivations behind the number of Puritan treatments on the subject of regeneration, in *A Puritan Theology*, 463. For a summary of the reformed development of the relationship of baptism and regeneration, especially as they relate to faith, see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.29-33, 53-59, 64-68.

Owen, is a "sign and figure of grace," rather than the grace of regeneration itself.[37] The Holy Spirit regenerates believers before working faith in them, then baptism follows as a believer's visible profession, "a sign and seal," of what the Spirit has already done.[38] Though both Owen and Aquinas agreed that regeneration precedes an act of faith in believers and that regeneration is wholly a work of God's grace, they diverged as to the nature of and relationship between regeneration and baptism. While Aquinas connected baptism with the actual work of regeneration, Owen wanted to guard against any human participation in something that he saw as solely belonging to the Holy Spirit. If regeneration is something only God can do, then in Owen's theology baptism cannot be causally linked with it. Aquinas' assertion that regeneration through baptism was still an act of God's grace notwithstanding, to Owen, connecting "inherent, habitual righteousness" and regeneration with baptism, "overthrows the gospel, and all the whole work of the Spirit of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."[39] Baptism itself can only be representative and symbolic of the Spirit's inner work of regeneration. It can never be either the cause or means of regeneration.

The concept of regeneration emphasises Owen's reliance on God for the whole of the process of renewal. Owen describes God's role in regeneration as active and the believer's role in regeneration as passive.[40] He is careful to guard the Spirit's work in regeneration from

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[37] Owen, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6.39. See also *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.12; *Of Infant Baptism,* 16.260; *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm 131*, 6.591; Owen's distinction between regeneration itself and baptism as the sign and seal of it here is standard usage among the Reformed Orthodox. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 15.14.5; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.471-524; The *Westminster Confession of Faith* chs. 27-28; *1658 Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* chs. 28-29. À Brakel's separation between sign and thing signified surprisingly enabled him to allow for occasional cases where rebaptism might be acceptable despite both the British and Continental Reformed churches insistence that baptism ought to be administered only once. See *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.491.

[38] *1658 Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order,* 29.1. There is even a deliberate gap placed between regeneration and baptism. See *The Savoy Declaration*, 29.5-6. À Brakel further points out that "a physical object [i.e. water] cannot interact with a spirit – in a physical or natural manner, nor can it bring forth anything in it that is spiritual." *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.498. He is also careful to deny that grace is inherent in the act of baptism itself in *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 2.491.

[39] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.218.

[40] "Wherever this word is spoken with respect unto an active efficiency, it is ascribed unto God; he creates us anew, he quickens us, he begets us of his own will. But where it is spoken with respect unto us, there it is

any credit humanity, even believing humanity, might claim. “From the whole it appears that our regeneration is a work of the Spirit of God, and that not any act of our own.”[41] Owen clarifies that the giving of commands in scripture to those who are not regenerated in no way implies that they have an ability to comply with those commands on their own. Commands are intended to point them to their own inability, for regeneration is something that only God can do and actually does prior to believers’ gospel obedience anyway.[42] Through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit power to obey is conferred upon believers. This is the significance of the term “new birth” in relationship to regeneration. A birth in physical life marks the beginning of all human abilities, so in spiritual life the new birth marks the beginning of a new ability to live for God. Gospel obedience is precisely that which follows from regeneration and is enabled by it. This work of rebirth and renewal includes both the initiating and the continuing work of the Spirit’s renovating ability in believers that enables their obedience and continued holiness. Owen writes of regeneration providing a “furnishment of spiritual power and ability,” without which believers “cannot perform any one act that is spiritually good, nor any one act of vital obedience.”[43]

Owen emphasises again that the Spirit’s work in regeneration is something that only the Spirit can do. Believers have an abiding presence of God in them as a result of this regenerating work.[44] The Spirit’s presence gives them both the ability and the power to fight against sin and to pursue spiritual actions and ends. This is the importance of disposition in Owen. The Spirit’s regenerating work gives believers new dispositions for God-directed goals. Only the Holy Spirit has the power and ability to accomplish the dispositional-level change that is required in regeneration.

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passively expressed; we are created in Christ Jesus, we are new creatures, we are born again, and the like; which one observation is sufficient to evert the whole hypothesis of Arminian grace.” Ibid. 317.

[41] Ibid. 336.

[42] Ibid. 336–337.

[43] Ibid. 477.

[44] Ibid. 336-337.

The topic of regeneration also points to a symmetry between the Spirit's work in both the old and new covenants. Owen considers the process of regeneration to work in a parallel way to the Spirit's work in the original creation.

> In this state of things, the Holy Spirit undertaketh to create a new world, new heavens and a new earth, wherein righteousness should dwell. And this, in the first place, was by his effectual communication of a new principle of spiritual life unto the souls of God's elect, who were the matter designed of God for this work to be wrought upon. This he doth in their regeneration, as we shall now manifest.[45]

Just as the Spirit was involved in the original creation and infusion of physical life, so he is involved in the creation and infusion of spiritual life. The sanctification of believers is a continuation of the Holy Spirit's work of re-creation, a work which emphasises the graciously infused nature of the dispositional-level change that is essential for sanctification. The Spirit's regenerating work in the new creation mirrors his work in the original creation in that both contain creation and infusion.[46] First the Spirit forms, then the Spirit fills. But there is an important difference. Where the Spirit's work in the original creation was creation proper, the Spirit's work in the new creation also includes renovation and renewal as well as creation. This is key for understanding Owen's emphasis on disposition. The Spirit's work in the new creation includes recreation of something old as well as creating something wholly new. The old nature is renewed, and a new nature is given. These are not two distinct processes, but rather part of one and the same dispositional work.

Owen's development of the doctrine of regeneration describes both a moment but even more a process by which a complete change takes place in believers. This change reaches into the core of one's being and results in a new disposition, one which enables a person to reach towards God. This work flows entirely from God and is completely without

[45] Ibid. 207.

[46] Ibid. 82. Owen describes the Holy Spirit's work in giving life to Adam at creation as a work of "infusion of a living or quickening soul unto him." Ibid. 82; see also 130-13. Owen comments on the Holy Spirit's infusion of grace at the incarnation as well. "And this work of sanctification, or the original infusion of all grace into the human nature of Christ, was the immediate work of the Holy Spirit." Ibid. 168. For a critique of Owen's "Spirit Christology" see Oliver Crisp, *Revisioning Christology,* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 91-110. For a rather less critical approach but one that also acknowledges the difficulties in Owen's development see Alan Spence, *Inspiration and Incarnation,* 138-144.

source in the believer, thus Owen draws a distinction between regeneration and baptism. But regeneration does result in a change for the whole of the believer's triad of mental faculties. Regeneration imparts a new nature for believers, one that is empowered by God through the Holy Spirit. There is a parity in the Spirit's work both in the old covenant and the new covenant.

But once believers have been brought to life through the Spirit's work of regeneration, how are believers given this new disposition? Owen's answer is the concept of a gracious infusion.

**Dispositions Infused through Grace**

Dispositions are infused by the Holy Spirit as a gracious act. Infusion describes the mechanics of the interaction between the Holy Spirit and human nature.[47] Owen emphasises in *Pneumatologia* that God is the only one who can provide this new disposition for believers, and if the disposition comes from God to believers, then it must come as an act of his grace. Owen writes that a gracious and holy disposition is "a virtue, a power, a principle of spiritual life and grace, wrought, created, infused into our souls, and inlaid in all the faculties of them, constantly abiding and unchangeably residing in them, which is antecedent unto, and the next cause of, all acts of true holiness whatever."[48] Infusion, then, results in a holistic change of human nature flowing from divine activity to believers, and it is required to accomplish the perfection of human capacities necessary for beatitude.[49] This change results

[47] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.218-219.

[48] Ibid. 475; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.51.4. Cleveland engages with Owen's development of "infused habits" at length in his *Thomism in John Owen*, yet other than a passing reference to Owen's comments that this disposition is infused into the mind, will, and affections, Cleveland almost wholly neglects the key ontological focus that Owen maintains. Infused dispositions are not simply something external added to humanity, they are the means by which the Spirit transforms and renews humanity, down to its very nature. It is precisely what these dispositions are infused into that demonstrates their importance in Owen's doctrines of regeneration and sanctification. See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 69-120.

[49] See Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics,* 2nd edition, (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 106. Owen comments on the complementary nature of both the "beatifical vision" and an emphasis on the "daily practice" of faith that is "turned into sight, and grace into glory," pointing to the

not only in the enablement of new abilities, it actually provides the faculties which are responsible for divinely-purposed acts.

The language of infused grace and habitual grace (or a gracious disposition) points to a key clarification Owen makes, that is, the distinction between different types of grace.[50] He writes of "a twofold gracious power necessary to render the command for holiness and obedience thereunto easy and pleasant."[51] Here Owen distinguishes between habitual grace, or "That which is habitually resident in the hearts and souls of believers, whereby they are constantly inclined and disposed unto all fruits of holiness,"[52] and the "actual assistance of effectual grace required hereunto," which he describes as actual grace.[53] Both of "these sorts of grace are administered in the new covenant" and are active in believers, and both are necessary for the correct functioning of the new disposition.[54] One is responsible for the initial work of conversion and produces faith.[55] The other enables the regular and ongoing participation of believers with the work of the Holy Spirit through regeneration and the impartation of an inclination toward what God expects of his people in gospel holiness.[56] He

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necessity of both the goal and the means of faith in order to receive "the life, power, and sweetness, of these heavenly things." In *On the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 7.336-337. He also describes spiritual mindedness is "the infusion and communication of a principle of life" which results in all the "actings of grace, all duties of obedience." Ibid. 489. This infusion is responsible for believers being able to be spiritually minded in Owen's theology. Owen's use of "infusion" in *Pneumatologia* emphasises not so much "the sovereignty of God in salvation" as the completeness of the Spirit's work on human nature through sanctification. See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 78; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.7.

[50] See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms,* 129-130 for more on the distinctions between the various modes of grace the Reformed Orthodox employed in their explanations.

[51] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.621.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid. 622. Turretin makes a similar distinction between God's work in believers as habitual and actual in his discussion of the work of conversion. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 15.4.13-17.

[54] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.622.

[55] "The work of conversion itself, and in especial the act of believing, or faith itself, is expressly said to be of God, to be wrought in us by him, to be given unto us from him. The Scripture says not that God gives us ability or power to believe only,—namely, such a power as we may make use of if we will, or do otherwise; but faith, repentance, and conversion themselves are said to be the work and effect of God." Ibid. 320.

[56] "Such a power I acknowledge, which is acted in the co-operation of the Spirit and grace of Christ with the grace which believers have received, unto the performance of all acts of holy obedience; whereof I must treat elsewhere. Believers have a stock of habitual grace; which may be called indwelling grace in the same sense wherein original corruption is called indwelling sin. And this grace, as it is necessary unto every act of spiritual obedience, so of itself, without the renewed co-working of the Spirit of Christ, it is not able or sufficient to produce any spiritual act. This working of Christ upon and with the grace we have received is called enabling of us; but with persons unregenerate, and as to the first act of faith, it is not so." Ibid. 321.

elsewhere describes this distinction between habitual grace, or a gracious disposition, and actual grace in terms of what God does and when.

> Actual grace is an illapse of divine influence and assistance, working in and by the soul any spiritual act or duty whatsoever, without any pre-existence unto that act or continuance after it, "God working in us, both to will and to do." But this habitual grace is always resident in us, causing the soul to be a meet principle for all those holy and spiritual operations which by actual grace are to be performed.[57]

Habitual grace, or a gracious disposition, is what the Holy Spirit infuses into the souls of believers that dispose their natures and faculties towards God. Actual grace produces gracious and specific actions in believers. Both actual grace and habitual grace are gracious acts of God towards and in humanity. One creates, the other continues. One is occasional, the other is regular. One begins, the other sustains.

What is this grace that is infused? Owen describes it as a "quality or spiritual habit, permanent and abiding in the soul."[58] Infused grace is responsible for the gracious disposition in Owen's theology; this "quality" or disposition is what is put into a believer's soul to renew human faculties. Owen maintains that through regeneration there is an "infusion of a new, real, spiritual principle into the soul and its faculties, of spiritual life, light, holiness, and righteousness, disposed unto and suited for the destruction or expulsion of a contrary, inbred, habitual principle of sin and enmity against God, enabling unto all acts of holy obedience."[59] New dispositions in Owen's theology come as a result of a work of God upon human nature. God is clearly the source of the new disposition, and it is through infusion by the Holy Spirit that believers are implanted with this disposition. Owen defines this gracious disposition in his work on *Communion with God*:

> This is that which I intend by this habit of grace,—a new gracious, spiritual life, or principle, created, and bestowed on the soul, whereby it is changed in all its faculties and affections fitted and enabled to go forth in the way of obedience unto every divine object that is proposed unto it, according to the mind of God.[60]

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[57] Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* 2.200-201.
[58] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.106.
[59] Ibid. 218-219.
[60] Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* 2.200.

The importance of this point will become especially relevant in the following chapter on dispositions and character, but it is worth noting now that Owen sees the development of Christian character as having its source irreducibly in the gracious work of God's Spirit. There is no gracious disposition in humans apart from an infusion of God's grace to them.

Owen describes this gracious infusion as the Spirit taking believers with their corrupted faculties and their abilities, and adding new divinely empowered capacities alongside the old abilities.[61] The principle of sin has been removed through regeneration, but a new work of infusion is necessary to enable positive holiness. Throughout Owen's writings on the subject of the new disposition, he regularly places God's grace at the fore of this work of infusion.[62] The language of "infused grace" is particularly important in order to understand Owen's teaching on the concept of the gracious disposition. Owen maintains that "men cannot, in any sense, be completely virtuous unless they have grace."[63] Though there may be a sort of moral uprightness without grace, the sort of character that God requires of humanity necessitates infused grace. Humanity is not capable of such virtue on its own.

Owen's view of infused grace was common to Protestants at the time he was writing. His use of the category of infused grace is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Reformed Orthodox to retain continuity with the medieval theological tradition. They were willing to make distinctions and adjust the theology they had inherited when they thought it necessary, as demonstrated in their works on justification. But the Reformed Orthodox also routinely

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[61] In contrast with Aquinas, Owen nowhere connects infused virtue with baptism. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, Q.69.4-5. Owen also describes God's work as giving a "new faculty," but his meaning is better understood as referring to renewed faculties rather than imparting wholly different faculties. See *Pneumatologia*, 3.252. Owen is not saying God gives believers different faculties of mind, will, and affections than they had before conversion, but rather that those faculties are renovated. Following infusion the believer's faculties are enabled to function properly, which prior to the Spirit's work they were unable to do. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.221-222. This work in believers mirrors the Spirit's work upon the human nature of Christ. See Owen, *Sermons*, 9.482-484; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 248-249.

[62] "There is not any thing done in us or by us that is holy and acceptable unto God, but it is an effect of the Holy Spirit; it is of his operation in us and by us. Without him we can do nothing; for without Christ we cannot, John 15:5, and by him alone is the grace of Christ communicated unto us and wrought in us. By him we are regenerated; by him we are sanctified; by him we are cleansed; by him are we assisted in and unto every good work." Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.27.

[63] Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, 13.428.

complain that they are accused of denying inherent righteousness, or a real righteousness present in the souls of believers, when they regularly maintain the presence of this infused grace and its accompanying inherent righteousness in believers.[64] Turretin even states that without this infused righteousness salvation is impossible for believers.[65] Owen describes the Spirit's infusion of grace as that which is responsible for such an internal principle of gracious obedience in the believer. Through a work of infusion, grace flows from God to the believer resulting in a Spirit-empowered capacity for holiness.

> The same thing is intended when we say in other words, that without an infused habit of internal inherent grace, received from Christ by an efficacious work of the Spirit, no man can believe or obey God, or perform any duty in a saving manner, so as it should be accepted with him.[66]

So infused grace results in inherent holiness. God makes his people holy through giving them new faculties which are enabled to function according to divine purposes, then he works, by his Spirit, through those faculties to produce actual holiness in their lives. Not only does God do so in believers, but Owen also points out that this inherent grace flows from the work of the Spirit because of God's covenant with his people.[67] In other words, it is through this infused disposition God fulfils his promise to unfailingly work holiness in his people.

Owen frequently uses such terms as "habitual grace" and "gracious habits" in place of "disposition" throughout his writings, but all these terms refer to something divinely infused into believers. He links "habitual grace" directly with "the gracious suitableness and

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[64] See Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.63-64; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 16.2.4. Charnock cites Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae Q.110.2 explicitly in defence of his explanation of infused dispositions in *Works* 3.105-107. For more on infusion, see Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, s.v. 'gratia inhaerens,' gratia infusa,' 'habitus gratiae,' and 'habitus infusus.' This emphasis on infusion represents a development of the Reformed Orthodox following the Reformation, as the earlier reformers generally avoided the terminology of "infused grace" for fear of confusing the disagreement with Rome on the subject of justification. See Muller, *PRRD*, 1.355-359. Beeke and Jones have strangely little to say on the subject of infusion in their *A Puritan Theology*.

[65] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 17.1.9-10, 16; 17.3.1-16

[66] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.292.

[67] Owen, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 6.134; see also Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 12.2.16, 19, 21, 25.

disposition of the soul unto spiritual operations."[68] God's grace is responsible for bestowing the new disposition that enables spiritual life in believers. Not only does this grace follow on from the gift of spiritual life through regeneration, the gracious infusion also produces a disposition of godliness. It is the beginning and inciting movement that results in gracious activity within the believer as a result of infusion by the Holy Spirit. Such a "habit of grace" is responsible for "inherent righteousness," a "habitually resident" beginning and enablement of "holy obedience" on the part of believers.[69] This righteousness is both internal and external, and God is the "object" of both types of obedience, whether in the heart alone or demonstrated through outward action.[70] Inherent grace guarantees that believers will not be conquered by their sin.[71] The Spirit's infusion is the source of the believer's ongoing ability to pursue sanctification. The result of this inherent grace is essential for the enablement of communion with God.[72] Gospel holiness is possible because of the infused grace of the new disposition. Owen treats infused grace as a commonly accepted and necessary concept in Reformed Orthodoxy.

Now Owen also points out that this infused grace flows from the Spirit's gracious work upon human nature rather than from the Spirit's indwelling presence in believers.[73] The

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[68] See Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.341.
[69] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.64; *Pneumatologia*, 3.527-528.
[70] Ibid. 528-529.
[71] Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers,* 6.51. Owen warns believers that inherent grace is no guarantee against believers committing "great sins," yet that does not mean that believers are able to ultimately fall away, in *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Sin in Believers,* 6.279-282
[72] Owen, *A Vindication of Some Passages in a Discourse Concerning Communion with God* 2.303.
[73] Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, 4.383-384. A misunderstanding of this point seems to be behind Fesko's strange comment that "the Reformed concept of habit arises from the indwelling presence of the Spirit, not an infused gift." See J. V. Fesko, "Infused Habits in Reformed Soteriology," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed by Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2018), 258. Owen clearly distinguishes between the Spirit's work as indwelling believers and the Spirit's work as providing gifts as separate but complementary works. Infused dispositions, in Owen's development, stem from the latter rather than the former. See Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, 4.384, 388. The indwelling Spirit does work in and through the graces granted as a result of the infused disposition, as Owen explains in *Pneumatologia*, 3.389-39, yet this work still follows infusion. Owen comments that the indwelling of the Spirit in believers is responsible for union with Christ, in *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, 4.385. For more on the Spirit's work in indwelling believers see Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.329-365. See Kapic, "The Spirit as Gift," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology,* 120-121 for a brief

grace of Christ through the work of the Spirit is responsible for all holy actions on the part of believers. Anything that results from the infusion of the disposition ultimately stems from God's gracious actions upon his people. Owen emphasises God's grace as standing behind all good works that God enables in believers. But an infusion infuses something into the believer, and for a specific purpose. In other words, this gracious disposition is a result of the Spirit's working on divinely renewed and infused human capacities rather than working through his indwelling presence. Owen notes two specific aspects of this graciously infused disposition. Infused grace produces a disposition that results in dispositional grace in the life of the believer, and dispositional grace enables gospel obedience and an inclination towards God.

Owen also points out that this infused disposition is different from other "spiritual gifts" that God gives believers, even though those "spiritual gifts" come from the same source.[74] Gifts, in Owen's development, are simply imparted by the Spirit. They are then used as fully implemented abilities given by God. With the new disposition, however, God gives the disposition and the Spirit empowers it, but the believer has the responsibility to use and improve the disposition for God's glory through daily conflict against sin.[75] Gifts are given to help the believer in this battle against corrupt dispositions, but the gifts are both separate from and, in most situations, previously dependent on the presence of a renewed disposition. Owen neither gives much in the way of further explanation on this point here nor returns to the topic of spiritual gifts until the end of the second volume of *Pneumatologia*. He does shortly after this comment warn that although spiritual gifts are tremendously important and may be a sign of grace in life of the one possessing the gifts, "when all is done, they are not

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explanation of this point in Owen's theology. Owen even cites the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Bellarmine in defence of his view of the necessity of infused faith, in *The Reason of Faith,* 4.114.

[74] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.473. For a helpful explanation of the Spirit's work in believers in Aquinas' thought see, Andrew Pinsent, "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 475-488.

[75] See Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.623-624. The majority of volume 6 in the collected edition of Owen's works deals with treatments of how Christians are to fight sin and temptation. See *On the Mortification of Sin* (1656), *Of Temptation* (1658), and *On Indwelling Sin in Believers* (1668).

holiness; nor are the duties performed in the strength of them alone duties of evangelical obedience, accepted of God in them by whom they are performed; and they may be where there is nothing of holiness at all."[76] Spiritual gifts are important, but they are neither a definitive sign of nor the same as a gracious disposition. "These things go a great way in the world, and many deceive both themselves and others by them."[77] Just because something has the appearance of a gift does not mean it is proof of the presence of God's gracious work on a person. Though from the outside it may look the same, the gracious disposition is something completely different from spiritual gifts.

The graciously infused disposition is also the source of believers being made "conformable unto God."[78] A gracious disposition is what provides the power for the believer to continue to incline toward God. Notice how Owen explains the way this new and gracious disposition works in believers: it "doth not only incline and dispose the mind, but gives it power, and enables it to live unto God in all holy obedience."[79] The infused disposition does not merely make Christian obedience possible; it is actually what fuels it and ensures it will happen. Owen describes this disposition as "the internal principle of life, whence all vital acts in the life of God do proceed."[80] He states that "the spring" of this disposition "is in our head, Christ Jesus, it being only an emanation of virtue and power from him unto us by the Holy Ghost."[81] Through the infusing work of the Holy Spirit, a new nature flows from Christ to the believer. God infuses believers with the disposition as an act of his grace, and this infusion results in abilities for believers to fulfil all that is required in gospel obedience. Even the obedience God calls believers to is enabled through a graciously infused capacity.

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[76] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.501–502.
[77] Ibid. 501.
[78] Ibid. 469.
[79] Ibid. 473.
[80] Ibid. 478.
[81] Ibid. 475.

Owen emphasises the priority of grace throughout his discussion on the Spirit's infused work. He states that one of his reasons for writing this volume was to "give the pre-eminence in all unto grace, and not unto ourselves."[82] He complains in his preface to the work that talking about God's grace had become "amongst many a matter of reproach and scorn," and his *Pneumatologia* is his attempt to rectify that problem.[83] Owen explains that God graciously infuses the disposition which enables believers to live in a way that inclines them toward himself. This is a point he emphasises early in the first part of the volume. "There is not any spiritual or saving good from first to last communicated unto us, or that we are from and by the grace of God made partakers of, but it is revealed to us and bestowed on us by the Holy Ghost."[84]

The importance of the Holy Spirit's graciously infused work in believers cannot be overstated in Owen's theology.[85] Not only does the Spirit's work enable believers to live righteously, the Spirit's work also precedes any human response and actually creates that response.[86] One of the responses that God's work creates is the sanctification of believers, but even this work comes as a consequence of the graciously infused disposition. "And that power which we have and do exercise in the progress of this work, in sanctification and holiness, proceeds from the infused principle which we receive in our regeneration."[87] The infused aspect of the new disposition necessarily points to grace in Owen's theology. "This is that which we must cleave to, or all the glory of God's grace is lost, and the grace administered by Christ neglected."[88] Whatever results in the life of the believer because of this infusion, and Owen is clear that the Spirit's work accomplishes a tremendous amount in believers, the Spirit's infusion of a new disposition is still a work of grace.

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[82] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.10.
[83] Ibid. 8.
[84] Ibid. 27.
[85] Ibid. 23.
[86] Ibid. 320-321.
[87] Ibid. 336-337.
[88] Ibid. 316.

Owen's treatment of infused dispositions shows his both his continuity with the catholic Christian tradition and his willing to adjust that tradition to fit with the doctrinal distinctiveness of Reformed Orthodoxy as well. The focus on infusion points to the divine role in giving dispositions to believers, and the consideration of dispositions shows that the Spirit creates in believers that which is sanctified in them. God's grace is continually behind the Spirit's work of infusion and sanctification. Owen emphasises that God is glorified by a consistent focus on grace throughout the whole of the Spirit's work in humanity.

**Infusion Follows Justification**

Infused dispositions, in Owen's theology, only follow on from or after justification. As important as this disposition is, it is the consequence of justification rather than a part of it. If regeneration is part of Owen's distinctly Reformed development of the work of the Holy Spirit through the new disposition, Owen's emphasis on the infused disposition being given following justification is part of his deliberately Protestant understanding of the subject.[89] Owen locates this infused disposition as something that the Holy Spirit alone can work, and this infusion takes place only after the work of regeneration has been commenced. The provision of a radically different nature through "our restoration by Christ" is as easy for God to do his creation of Adam in "original rectitude and righteousness.[90] The question is not whether or not God can put righteousness in his people, for this is precisely what God is pleased to do; God can as easily create new gracious dispositions in his children as he can create new creatures in uprightness and holiness. The question is when this happens. In Owen's theology the ordering of these events is of critical importance.

[89] See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 116-120.
[90] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 4.165.

Owen argues the necessity of understanding what precisely is the "formal cause of justification" for believers, denying that infused righteousness can be that formal cause.[91] He understands the Roman church to teach that "the righteousness whereby we are righteous before God is the formal cause of our justification; and this righteousness, they say, is our own inherent, personal righteousness," whereas he states that for the Reformed Orthodox the formal cause of justification is "the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us."[92] Contrary to Aquinas' view that the work of justification includes an infusion of grace to the believer, Owen denies that the scripture teaches any sort of "making of any man righteous by the infusion of a habit or principle of righteousness."[93] Justification, in Owen's theology, is a "juridical pronunciation," a concept that has an inherently "forensic sense," and comes only a result of God's declaration of pardon on the sinner because of the righteousness of Christ.[94] Sinners are not made righteous in justification, they are declared to be righteous on account of another. Justification is a matter of imputation rather than infusion.[95] Owen sees infused righteousness as an essential component of the work of regeneration, but it is only so when it is connected with sanctification and separated from justification. He states, "our sanctification, in the infusion of a principle of spiritual life, and the actings of it unto an increase in duties of holiness, righteousness, and obedience, is that whereby we are made

[91] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.241-242; *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.63. Owen makes extensive use of the Aristotelian differentiation of causality throughout this work. See *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,* 5.292; also *The Larger Catechism,* 1.485. He later demonstrates significant nuance in discussing three distinct variations in which the righteousness of Christ is the formal cause of the justification of believers. *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,* 5.207.

[92] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,* 5.63, 207. Both Owen and Aquinas agree that God's grace is the cause of human salvation in justification, but they disagree as to the cause of the application of that grace. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.111.1-2, Q.112.1, Q.113.7-8; the Council of Trent, session 6, *On Justification*, chapter 7. For a brief treatment of the medieval understanding of infused grace and its relationship to justification see Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37-41.

[93] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.129; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.113.1-2, 8.

[94] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.129-130.

[95] "We do by no means assign the same place, condition, state, and use to the obedience of Christ imputed to us, and our obedience performed to God. If we did, they were really inconsistent. And therefore those who affirm that our obedience is the condition or cause of our justification, do all of them deny the imputation of the obedience of Christ unto us. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, as that on the account whereof we are accepted and esteemed righteous before God, and are really so, though not inherently." Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* 2.181.

meet for glory."[96] Owen cautions against neglecting or even denying the concept of gracious dispositions, for to do so "would plainly overthrow the covenant of God, and all the grace of it."[97] Yet infusion is not a work that figures in Owen's understanding of justification.

Justification and sanctification are carefully distinguished in Reformed Orthodoxy.[98] Owen sees Rome as merging justification and sanctification, whereas he understands these to be two separate works. In Owen's theology, the infused disposition is only properly considered under the doctrine of sanctification; to put it in the doctrine of justification throws off the whole discussion of how believers are accounted righteous. There is something that has been infused and results in both genuine transformation and real righteousness in the believer. There is a "real change asserted—that is, in the renovation of our natures," but, and this is important to note, it only "consists the true entire work and nature of our sanctification" rather than the work of justification.[99]

Owen explains that the new disposition must be distinguished from justification precisely because this infusion produces genuine righteousness in believers and makes them inherently righteous. The infusion of a gracious disposition has to follow justification; it cannot come as a part of justification, because justification, in Owen's theology, must come solely as a result of the work of Christ and his righteousness alone.[100] If inherent

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[96] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,* 5.131. Owen continues with his proof of infusion being the cause of inherent righteousness as a result of sanctification. "But the apostle makes an express distinction between them, and, as this author observes, proceeds from one to another, by an ascent from the lesser to the greater. And the infusion of a habit or principle of grace, or righteousness evangelical, whereby we are inherently righteous, by which he explains our being justified in this place, is our sanctification, and nothing else. Yea, and sanctification is here distinguished from washing,—"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified;" so as that it peculiarly in this place denotes positive habits of grace and holiness: neither can he declare the nature of it any way different from what he would have expressed by being justified." Ibid. 132.

[97] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.330.

[98] See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 16.1.10; 16.2.4-10, 21; 16.3.6, 9; 17.1.1-22; 17.3.1-3; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3.3-4.

[99] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5.132.

[100] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.77. Owen is clear, "[God] requireth nothing of us in a way of righteousness for our justification for the future. That this also he would have done we might have justly expected; for a righteousness we must have, or we cannot be accepted with him… Neither is there any mention in the whole gospel of God's requiring a righteousness in us upon the account whereof we should be justified before him, or in his sight; for the justification by works mentioned in James consists in the evidencing and declaration of our faith by them." Ibid. 378-379.

righteousness is a part of justification, then human merit comes into the discussion, and Owen is very cautious to guard against any semblance of human credit when it comes to the source of salvation. Dispositions are infused, in Owen's theology, only as an act that follows justification and is independent from it. Whereas justification is dependent upon the once and final work of Christ's redemption, renovation through sanctification is dependent upon the Spirit's continually renewing work in believers.

**Disposition 'Unceasing'/Guaranteed**

There is one final element of Owen's development of the concept of disposition as a consequence of the work of the Holy Spirit that needs to be explored. In Owen's theology, the start of the work of renovation guarantees that the work will be completed.

> It is also permanent herein, and abideth for ever. It will never cease inclining and disposing the whole soul unto acts and duties of obedience, until it come unto the end of them all in the enjoyment of God. It is "living water," and whosoever drinketh of it shall never thirst any more, that is, with a total indigence of supplies of grace, but it is "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," John 4:14. It springs up, and that as always, without intermission, because it is living water, from which vital acts are inseparable, so permanently, without ceasing, it springs up into everlasting life, and faileth not until those in whom it is are safely lodged in the enjoyment of it.[101]

The Spirit's work in believers through the infusion of a new disposition is a work that has a guaranteed completion because it is guaranteed by the power of God.

Not only does sanctification as a result of the graciously infused disposition show the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Owen's theology, but it also helps believers reflect on their continual connection to Christ as coming solely as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit is responsible for ensuring that the infused disposition remains effective in believers. Believers are not able to guarantee their own salvation, even through the work of the infused disposition, but the Spirit's work ensures their connection to the

[101] Ibid. 487.

source of spiritual life.[102] Owen uses the language of a vine and a root from the Gospel of John to describe how God's people remain in Jesus. He is their life, and the Spirit is the one who connects them to that life.

The Holy Spirit stands behind the infused disposition guaranteeing that it continues to incline the believer towards God. The Holy Spirit is the agent that retains the connection between Jesus Christ, the root and source of all life, and believers. It is through the Spirit's work that believers are then enabled to bear fruit. Without this continual enablement through the Holy Spirit, Owen points out that in their spiritual lives believers would quickly shrivel and die. The Holy Spirit is the divine fountain, "a spring of living water to bubble up and put forth refreshing streams," that connects believers to their Saviour, and does so through the infusion of a divinely empowered and graciously enabled disposition.[103]

It is because regeneration results in the infusion of a "new divine nature" in believers that the Spirit's work accomplishes its purposes in believers.[104] The Spirit creates something new in place of the old corruption. Through regeneration the natural indisposition to God is removed and the new nature constantly inclines the believer towards God. Owen urges the importance of the idea that this renovation will certainly be completed in true believers, because the source of these actions is not the believer but instead the Holy Spirit.

> From what hath been proved it is evident that the work of sanctification is a progressive work, that holiness is gradually carried on in us by it towards perfection. It is neither wrought nor completed at once in us, as is regeneration, nor doth it cease under any attainments or in any condition of life, but is thriving and carried on. A river continually fed by a living fountain may as soon end its streams before it come to the ocean, as a stop be put to the course and progress of grace before it issue in glory.[105]

Renovation may at times be imperceptible for believers. Other times believers may feel they are being overwhelmed by their sin; yet the Spirit "cures and makes up, healing our

[102] Ibid. 475-476.
[103] Ibid. 388.
[104] Ibid. 484-488.
[105] Ibid. 397.

backslidings and repairing our decays. And he acts the grace we have received by constant fresh supplies."[106] Owen describes the Spirit's continual renovation in believers as the penultimate work of God, with only Christ's work of redemption as being greater in glory. He calls his readers to exercise faith by believing that the Spirit is a limitless fountain of grace who will not and cannot fail to finish this work of re-creation. The promised accomplishment of this work in believers is a profound source of comfort to Owen.

Owen's emphasis on the unfailing nature of the Spirit's infused disposition references the discussion of whether or not a disposition can be lost. It was commonly held that natural or acquired dispositions could be weakened and lost, but this happened largely through continual neglect or repeated actions that went contrary to the disposition. Not speaking an acquired language for years at a time will generally result in the loss of ability to speak that language. But Aquinas argues that virtuous dispositions are a different kind of disposition. Virtuous dispositions are infused rather than acquired. Infused grace can be lost through a single act of mortal sin.[107] Loss of the virtue of charity means loss of the disposition towards the good to which the virtue of charity directs. Though the Holy Spirit will not fail in the work of infusion, Aquinas held that believers can cut themselves off from that infused work through mortal sin.[108] Through their sin they can lose the ability to receive grace, not absolutely, as they can be restored through repentance and penance, but relatively, considered

[106]Ibid. 397-398.

[107] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 2a2ae, Q.24.12.

[108] See Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues,* 'On Charity,' articles 12 and 6. Aquinas draws a distinction between the subject and cause of the theological virtues, and it is this distinction that enables him to consider the possibility of a loss of a virtuous disposition that is given from the Holy Spirit. "First, charity's subject, though its substance is indestructible, still becomes ill disposed to this form because sin gives it a contrary disposition. Second, although charity's cause is incorruptible, the inflow from this cause is blocked by sin, which creates a divine between us and God," Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues,* 175. Aquinas also believed that it was possible for one in whom grace had been infused to lose that grace. See *Summa Theologica,* 1a2ae, Q.109.10. Grace is responsible for disposing believers toward the theological virtues, thus, if grace is lost, so also is the disposition for virtue. See Aquinas, 1a2ae, Q.110.3. Owen argues against the possibility of a loss of grace for believers, while also acknowledging that believers may undergo a decay in grace because of their own sin. This is not to say that believers do not continually depend on God's grace, for grace, in Owen's theology, is an inexhaustible fountain that is continually renewed in believers. But Owen fervently denies that believers can "sin away the Spirit and habit of grace." See Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed,* 11.118-120.

as to the Spirit's work in their lives at that moment. Reformed theologians rejected both the categories of and distinctions between mortal sins and venial sins.[109] Owen, while similarly rejecting such a distinction, also takes the discussion in a rather different direction.

One might have expected Owen to here rely on the doctrine of the perseverance of the believer. He had certainly written plenty on the subject, as larger Protestantism was divided between the Reformed and the Arminians over precisely this question.[110] But Owen instead emphasises the Holy Spirit's role in the infused disposition as the counter to the problem of potentially lost dispositions. A believer's possession of a renewed and divinely infused disposition means the Holy Spirit *will* finish his work in the believer. "This internal efficiency of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men, as to the event, is infallible, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious."[111] The Holy Spirit's work of renovation cannot fail because it is a divinely empowered work. Owen's emphasis in *Pneumatologia* is not that believers will persevere or remain in a state of grace, though he focuses on those ideas elsewhere. Instead, in *Pneumatologia* his key emphasis is that the Holy Spirit's infusion of a new disposition in them means that he will unfailingly work in them to keep their inclination pointed towards God.

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[109] See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 9.4.1-21. Owen explicitly denies the category of mortal sins as well. "For unto this end, to secure work for this purgatory, they coined the distinction of sins into mortal and venial; — not as unto their end, with respect unto faith and repentance, nor as unto the degrees of sin, with respect unto the aggravations, but as unto the nature of them; some of them being such (namely, those that are venial) as were capable of a purging expiation after this life, though men die without any repentance of them. And when this was done, they have cast almost all the sins that can be named under this order; and hereon this image is become an engine to disappoint the whole doctrine of the gospel, and to precipitate secure sinners into eternal ruin," Owen, *Sermons*, 8.584. "The Papists have a distinction of sins into mortal and venial, which is the foundation of one moiety of their superstition... Because this distinction is rejected by Protestants, they accuse them of teaching that all sins are equal. But this they do untruly," Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4.464.

[110] This was hardly the only issue that divided the Reformed and the Arminians, but it was certainly a large issue. Owen responded at great length to the Arminian John Goodwin's *Redemption Redeemed* (1651). See Owen's *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* in vol.11 of his collected works. On Goodwin and his Arminianism see John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution,* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2006), 199-232.

[111] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.317.

This is important to note. Owen's understanding of the Spirit's work in believers is not ultimately dependent upon human ability.[112] He is careful to note that a regeneration left up to the capacities of believers would be a false hope. Unless the Holy Spirit is continually involved, even a new nature is incapable of the holiness that God requires. Divinely sustained influence upon infused dispositions is what results in dispositional grace in believers.

> There is in our regeneration and habitual grace received a nature bestowed on us capable of growth and increase, and that is all; if it be left unto itself, it will not thrive, it will decay and die. The actual supplies of the Spirit are the waterings that are the immediate cause of its increase. It wholly depends on continual influences from God… The Lord Christ is the head, fountain, and treasure of all actual supplies; and the Spirit is the efficient cause, communicating them unto us from him. From hence it is that any grace in us is kept alive one moment, that it is ever acted in one single duty, that ever it receives the least measure of increase or strengthening. With respect unto all these it is that our apostle saith, "Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," Gal. 2:20. Spiritual life and living by it, in all the acts of it, are immediately from Christ.[113]

Christ's inexhaustible supply of grace is communicated to believers through the Spirit's work on infused dispositions. Human effort is involved, as Owen emphasises repeatedly throughout his writings on the topic of sanctification. The Spirit's work does not result in a lack of effort on the part of the believer. In fact, what Owen describes as "hardness of heart" and a repeated falling away is no small matter.[114] There may be "many, great decays in grace and holiness; that the work of sanctification goeth back in them, and that, it may be, universally and for a long season," but "is there no sincere holiness where such decays are found? God forbid."[115] Owen's concern motivates believers to fight against corrupt desires and actions, yet true believers will always be aware of the both the presence of indwelling sin and the Spirit's work of renovation. Dispositional regeneration is a work that depends both

[112] He connects the infusion of a supernatural disposition with participation in the divine nature. The infused disposition guarantees that the heart will continue to incline believers in a God-ward direction. "It is sufficient unto our present purpose that in and by these promises we are made partakers of the divine nature, and are therein endowed with a constant, habitual disposition and inclination unto all acts and duties of holiness; for our power followeth our love and inclinations, as impotency is a consequent of their defect," Ibid. 622-623.
[113] Ibid. 393.
[114] Owen, *A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace,* 7.536-537.
[115] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.404.

for its source and for its sustenance on Christ's grace as mediated through the work of the Holy Spirit rather than human effort.

The guaranteed completion of the work of this new disposition is further demonstrated by how Owen ties this new dispositional ability to obey to the Spirit's work as a key aspect of the covenant of grace.[116] In one sense, this is simply Owen saying that the gracious disposition is a product of God's work of redemption. Thus, by bringing up the covenant of grace in this statement, Owen is reminding his readers that the new disposition is but one part of a much larger work that God accomplishes in his plan of salvation across the ages. The covenantal aspect of gracious dispositions points to God's continuing faithfulness in working in the believer through the Holy Spirit in that disposition. The weight of God's covenant stands behind the work. But making explicit that the disposition is given as a part of the covenant of grace ensures that his readers understand the work of giving a disposition is entirely a work of grace on God's part, and it is a work that God puts his oath on bringing to completion. The principle that both enables and continues sanctification is a gracious gift.

This process does not merely begin with God, it ends with God as well. The disposition that is "wrought" is also "preserved…by the Spirit of God."[117] At the end of the quotation Owen states that this disposition is "always abiding in them." God does something in believers that enables them to continue in what he has called them to do. This graciously infused and guaranteed disposition is an essential part of what keeps a believer in a God-ward state. God, by ensuring that believers have a new disposition that is always abiding in them and inclining them toward "acts of holiness," is ensuring that they will continue in the works that God has determined are consistent with his character and the work of his Spirit in the lives of those whom he has saved. In the words of one of Owen's favourite theologian, "Give

[116] "Hence it follows that our holiness, which is the fruit and effect of this work, the work as terminated in us, as it compriseth the renewed principle or image of God wrought in us, so it consists in a holy obedience unto God by Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the covenant of grace, from the principle of a renewed nature," Ibid. 386, see also 472.
[117] Ibid. 472, 529.

what You command, and command what You will."[118] This is what God does in the life of the believer through his provision of a new and gracious disposition.

Dispositions are a key part of how believers are connected to Christ. The Spirit's work in infusing gracious dispositions in believers cannot fail, thus a gracious disposition cannot be lost. Believers are not ultimately responsible for retaining this disposition; that responsibility lies with the Holy Spirit. The new disposition is infused to believers as a part of the gift of a new nature, which Owen ties to the Spirit's distinct work in the covenant of grace. This new nature, through the Spirit's continual work, ensures that believers will incline towards God until they are glorified.

**Critique**

Owen emphasises the divine role in the process of regeneration and sanctification. Yet there is one obvious question that comes after reading his *Pneumatologia*: what part of the process of sanctification does human nature play? If dispositions are infused by God, empowered by God, and even acted upon by God, which part of the process of sanctification is the responsibility of the believer? Owen seems to so emphasise the divine side of sanctification that there is no room for human response.[119] In his emphasis on the Holy Spirit giving and empowering a new disposition in believers, it seems Owen shifts the emphasis in sanctification away from believers and puts the whole of the work of renewal on God. He maintains that God's grace and human effort in sanctification are necessarily intertwined; it is not possible to have one without the other.[120] Yet Owen repeatedly points to the Spirit as initiator, author, and accomplisher of sanctification. Even the things that Owen reminds

[118] Augustine of Hippo, "The Confessions of St. Augustin," in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Pilkington, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 153 (I have taken the liberty of modernising the language).
[119] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.367, 382. This aspect of Owen's Pneumatology, the Holy Spirit's work overshadowing the response of human nature, is the substance of Crisp's critique of Owen's "Spirit-Christology" in *Revisioning Christology,* 99-107.
[120] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.384.

believers that they have a responsibility in he states that the Holy Spirit does.[121] In fact, as he accused the "enthusiasts," it seems Owen has so emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit that he has functionally diminished the human responsibility for the use of means in sanctification.

Owen would reply that the human response in sanctification is not the point of his treatise on the Holy Spirit. *Pneumatologia* is about the Spirit's work not believers' response. He does point to the necessity of believers' response in sanctification in the latter half of *Pneumatologia,* but the emphasis is on what the Spirit does rather than what believers do. He calls believers to be sanctified and to put sin to death in their lives. But in *Pneumatologia* Owen lists the means that believers are to make us of to be sanctified as things that the Spirit provides and accomplishes in the lives of believers. In his other works on sanctification, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers, On Temptation, On Indwelling Sin in Believers,* and *On Spiritual-Mindedness* for example, Owen repeatedly points out that human beings do have a role in sanctification following the Spirit's regenerating work. But even in Owen's treatments on believers' role in sanctification, he still references the primacy of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification.

There are several solutions to this problem. First, Owen would likely point out that he is simply following the biblical paradigm for the doctrine of sanctification. The divine side of sanctification is entirely a work of God's grace, yet believers are still called to be sanctified themselves.[122] If scripture does not resolve that tension, why should Owen feel the need to? Second, Owen does still maintain the necessity of believers' sanctification in their own actions. Though he does not go into the same metaphysical exploration of the human response to sanctification as he does in the divine initiation of sanctification, the importance of the human response is not diminished. In fact, human response is entirely predicated on

[121] Though Owen demonstrates what believers' duty in sanctification is, what he states belongs to believers' duty he also states belongs to the Spirit's role as well. See ibid. 404-406, 389-391.
[122] Ibid. 394.

divine initiation. Third, Owen emphasises that it is through believers' dependence upon the Spirit for the work of sanctification that they are sanctified. In other words, as believers learn to see more and more how God renews and sanctifies them through his word and by the power of his Spirit, so they also learn to be more sanctified themselves. This is perhaps the most essential point behind Owen's emphasis on disposition being infused rather than acquired. It is not human effort that sanctifies believers. God does the work. Human effort is merely a response. Fourth, sanctification is a "secret" work which humans cannot fully understand.[123] Though it is possible to see someone who has grown in holiness, the actual process of sanctification is usually imperceptible. Fifth and finally, there is one aspect of sanctification that Owen does regularly point to as belonging to believers: act.[124] Owen points out that there are human acts which are in response to the enablement of the Spirit and because of the Spirit's work on human inclinations have God as the ultimate object of their action. Though he does emphasise that the Spirit acts through believers, he also maintains a focus on believers acting through the Spirit. The new disposition is empowered by the Holy Spirit, which then results in a genuine action on the part of the believer. Owen retains an emphasis on God's grace in, behind, and through every truly godly action a believer does, yet believers can still be properly described as committing sanctified acts. The Spirit's work sustains rather than negates "the exercise of spiritually vital acts, or the performance of duties of holiness."[125] Believers act through the Spirit's enablement as a branch bears fruit through its connection to the vine.[126] Yet bearing fruit is precisely what believers are both called to do and actually do.

Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's infused dispositions in believers balances on a knife edge. At times he so emphasises the divine initiative in regeneration and sanctification that it

[123] Ibid. 402
[124] See ibid. 527-538 for Owen's most succinct statement of this point.
[125] Ibid. 530.
[126] Ibid. 531.

seems anything that can properly be referred to as human response is completely eclipsed. Yet he also maintains that there is such a human response required precisely because of the infusion of new dispositions. Infused dispositions, after all, incline and dispose a person towards acts that are suitable for divine purposes. Whether or not the points made towards that end are satisfying solutions to the reader will likely depend on their level of sympathy to Owen's broader theological project. But though on the surface there seems to be a contradiction between Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's role in sanctification and his calls to believers to be sanctified, in his overall development there is a remarkable coherence. For Owen, God is entirely responsible for the salvation of his people. No credit can come to humanity. As he says of the will, believers only act as they are acted upon. Regeneration initiates and continues the divine side of sanctification in believers, and the Spirit's covenant guarantees that the work of sanctification will be brought to completion.

**Conclusion**

Disposition, as it is a core component of the work of sanctification, thus plays a central role in Owen's development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Owen's work is unique in the comprehensiveness of his treatment of the Spirit. He points to the Spirit's work of regeneration in believers as that which enables them to gain a new disposition. In Owen's theology, the only way that one can gain a gracious disposition is through the direct action of the Holy Spirit infusing a gracious disposition into believers. The language of infused grace is not distinct to Owen, though his particularly reformed development of the concept represents a significant emphasis in his *Pneumatologia*. Though Owen later emphasises that believers have a significant responsibility to steward this disposition well and use it to the glory of God for the mortification of sin in their lives, in this work he largely focuses on this disposition beginning and remaining solely with the work of God.

Disposition is a concept that Owen uses to describe what is it that the Holy Spirit changes in a person to make one able to please God as a Christian. This is something that the Spirit does supernaturally and cannot be done apart from the work of the Spirit. It also happens after the work of justification as a part of the Spirit's work of regeneration upon the inner person of the believer. This new disposition, also called a gracious habit in Owen's writings, is a foundational element of how Owen builds the doctrine of sanctification on the theological structure of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The certain knowledge of the Spirit's presence through the infused disposition promises completion of the work of renewal in believers. This point is a profound source of comfort to Owen. Because of the infusion of a new nature with new dispositions, believers may know that the Spirit will complete the work he has begun in them, resulting in eternal bliss, freedom from sin, and life forever before the face of God.[127]

[127] Ibid. 582.

## Chapter 5: Disposition - The Human Response

Now that we have seen Owen's explanation of the Spirit's role in infusing a gracious disposition into believers that inclines them towards God as their object, what continuing significance is there to sanctification? Is sanctification even necessary if God is already the object of the believer's heart? Despite Owen's distinctly protestant development of the concept of disposition, there is a remarkable coherence between Aquinas and Owen about sanctification. Both theologians emphasise that sanctification is a response of the Spirit-infused dispositions in the lives of believers that brings them into continually closer fellowship with God. This response is necessary for humans to be transformed so they can enjoy communion with God. Regeneration imparts a new nature, but sanctification produces holy acts. The whole human nature is transformed by infused grace progressively resulting in sanctification. Rather than emphasising a form of sanctification which merely calls believers to follow biblical laws, Owen urges Christians to respond to God's grace through sanctified acts, acts that are enabled not by human ability but because of divinely infused and Spirit-empowered dispositions. Virtuous character demonstrated through the continual renovation of mind, will, and affections is, in Owen's thought, a crucial piece of Christians living rightly before God.

### Response a Necessary Component

Though his emphasis on the Holy Spirit's primary role in the work of regeneration seems to leave little room for human response, Owen still maintains that sanctification necessarily involves humans acting through their renewed natures.

> Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, *and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God,* according unto the tenor and

> terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly: —It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.[1]

The Holy Spirit is the one who works in believers. He regenerates their natures by graciously infusing virtue or power into their minds, wills, and affections. This regeneration results in a gracious disposition on the part of the believer, one which inclines toward God. The Holy Spirit has done this; the process of renewal is entirely a work of the Spirit. Yet the believer still plays a part in producing holy acts. The Spirit's work in sanctification necessarily results in a human response. While the Spirit can be said to be working through believers and producing sanctified results in them, Owen should not be understood to imply that God's work is somehow like a puppeteer pulling all the strings. Rather, the Spirit's work animates believers, then they themselves, through the strength and virtue given them by the Spirit, produce sanctified acts because of the Spirit's influence on their minds, wills, and affections. Humans do play a significant role in the process of sanctification. Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's role in sanctification should not be seen as minimising the importance of an actual human response.

Owen's use of this ontology demonstrates the importance of understanding that disposition, as a concept, necessarily leads to action. That is what dispositions do; they enable action. Owen argues that this was true even from the creation of humanity in the garden, and even Adam before the fall had a "habitual disposition" which led to "continual actings" according to the purposes for which God created him.[2] The nature of a faculty or power, from the very beginning of creation, is that it enables and results in behaviour. Dispositions, by

[1] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.386 (emphasis mine). Turretin also points to this "real and internal renovation of man" which produces a "real change" and is demonstrated through "the exercise of holiness and of good works," in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 17.1.2-3. Turretin insists that sanctification must be understood as having both an active and a passive component to it. God works sanctification in believers, and believers then work sanctified acts in response. À Brakel pushes the importance of human response strikingly, even goes so far as to say that though sanctification is "by the influence of God's Spirit," a believer "sanctifies himself." See *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3.4-5.
[2] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.285.

working on human faculties, lead to action. That is the purpose for which God infuses dispositions in believers.

Owen's treatment of dispositions actually serves to increase the importance of action, for it is through right action that the presence of an infused disposition is demonstrated. The disposition is a critical part of the believer's ability to fulfil "all duties of obedience in our walking before God," for it is from this disposition that "all the holy actings of our understandings, wills, and affections" come.[3] Owen sees the power produced through the infusion of virtue into believers as being one of the purposes for which Christ died.[4] He complains about the lack of conformity to Christ among the Christians of his day, stating that to neglect following Christ's example for his people is as dangerous as making redemption to solely consist of following that example.[5]

**Responding Towards an End**

Sanctification is the process of renewal in the believer's life that has communion with God as its ultimate goal. To say it slightly differently, sanctification in Owen is acting towards a right *telos*. While sanctification results in virtuous character across the entirety of human nature, it must, in Owen's understanding, be focused towards this divine end in order to be biblical. Owen complains that other theologians in his day emphasise a sort of virtue and morality that is chiefly concerned with purely human goals rather than keeping God at the centre of the process of renewal. To focus on dispositional change without relying on infused virtues is, to Owen, little more than moralism.

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[3] Ibid. 472.

[4] "Therefore, by the blood of Christ herein is intended the blood of his sacrifice, with the power, virtue, and efficacy thereof." Ibid. 440.

[5] "To believe in Christ for redemption, for justification, for sanctification, is but one half of the duty of faith…this is not all that is required of us. Christ in the gospel is proposed unto us as our pattern and example of holiness; and as it is a cursed imagination that this was the whole end of his life and death,—namely, to exemplify and confirm the doctrine of holiness which he taught,—so to neglect his so being our example, in considering him by faith to that end, and labouring after conformity to him, is evil and pernicious." Ibid. 513.

Dispositional change flowing from infused virtues is an essential component for the development of Christian character in Owen's theology of sanctification. What is this character that is so fundamental to the new disposition? Aquinas, borrowing from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, uses the term "virtue" and it is a concept he elaborates throughout his writings.[6] Owen, though he also makes regular use of the term "virtue," prefers instead the more cumbersome "principle of grace and holiness" to describe a Spirit-wrought change in one's disposition.[7] As has happened repeatedly throughout this project, the terminology again becomes complicated. Aquinas sticks generally with "virtue," Owen has a significant aversion to aspects of the concept of "moral virtue" as used in his day which leads him to his unique and awkward terminology, and neither Aquinas nor Owen use the term "character" with anything like the contemporary significance we attach to it today. But all three sets of terminology – Christian character, virtue, and principle of grace and holiness, circle around the same idea: that of a person's dispositions of mind, will, and affections being directed towards and producing acts consistent with a divinely purposed and morally upright pattern in one's life.

Now the term "virtue" has several significations, both in Aquinas' and Owen's use and in contemporary use today. Aquinas, citing both Aristotle and Augustine, defines virtue as "a certain perfection of a power," or "a good quality of mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us."[8] Owen quotes Aristotle's definition of virtue as "a habit [disposition] which maketh him that hath it

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[6] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, QQ.55-67; 2a2ae is entirely taken up with discussions on both the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues; see also *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, passim.
[7] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.388, 472, 543. See Muller's definitions of the various *virtus* concepts in *The Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 327. Though he quibbles about the usefulness of the term "moral virtue" and even asks rhetorically whether humanity or the Holy Spirit knows better how to describe this "habit of mind," Owen admits he has no inherent problem with the concept of virtue itself. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.526-527; also Sebastian Rehnman, "Virtue and Grace," in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, (volume 25, number 4, 2012).
[8] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.55.1; *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23*, 1a2ae, Q.55.4.

good or virtuous, and his actions good."[9] Dispositions are related to the concept of virtue in that they are essentially perfected dispositions.[10] But virtue can also be described according "to its object, or to its act."[11] In other words, virtue can refer both to the product of virtue, that is – virtuous or righteous acts, and to the internal process that produces virtuous action – a perfected disposition. Owen's use of "virtue" includes both significations, and it will be important to distinguish between the two of them to understand what Owen wants to communicate. He also defines his "principle or habit of grace and holiness" as that which makes believers "meet for and enabled to live unto God," or we could say the power which perfects believers for their divine purpose.[12] These references together indicate that what Aquinas calls virtue and Owen calls a principle of grace and holiness are one and the same thing and it is clear that both thinkers are using virtue or Christian character in conjunction with the concept of disposition.

Virtue is commonly used today in both senses, though when it is referred to on its own it is usually used in reference to its object or considered synonymously with the idea of moral uprightness, rather than according to its act or the perfection of a disposition.[13] But this means that when we refer to virtue in this way we refer to virtue as a state rather than virtue as a process. Simply put, common use today often defines the effect of virtue as the whole of virtue and any higher goal of virtue is frequently neglected. But this aspect of purposes or ends, however, is a critical aspect of the concept of virtue. Owen argues the necessity of Christian goals for the development of distinctly Christian virtue.

Knowing the intended purpose of an object is essential for knowing how to use it. Take a hammer, for example. There are various types of hammers developed and purposed

[9] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.502.
[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.55.2.
[11] Ibid. Q.55.1.
[12] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.472.
[13] The first definition of "virtue" in both the Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary points to the ideal of morality rather than act; later definitions reference act.

for specific uses. Rarely will one hammer be able to work for a purpose for which it is not intended. The tool is designed for a specific function, and the best tool to use for that function is a tool that is so designed. One could say that the virtue of hammer is its ability to accomplish the purpose for which it was crafted, and a virtuous hammer is one that is able to fulfil its created goals consistently and reliably. Owen argues in this fashion for the importance of understanding why believers are sanctified. Sanctification for Christians means the process of renewal is pointed towards a certain goal.

Owen draws from the Aristotelian definition of virtue as that which consists of consistently right action towards a right end. In other words, right acts need right ends. For an act to be right it must flow from a right disposition, otherwise it might simply be an inadvertent action. While there is great similarity between actions of moral virtue and those of infused virtue – moral virtue consists of "nothing but strong and firm dispositions and inclinations unto moral acts and duties of their own kind" and an infused disposition, what Owen calls a "spiritual habit," has the same characteristics – there is also a significant distinction between the purposes for which these different types of virtue point.[14] In other words, not only must believers focus on what they do, they must even more focus on why they do it.

> It is, moreover, necessary and natural that every act of the will, every work of a man, be for a certain end. Two things, therefore, are to be considered in all our obedience: —first, The *duty* itself we do; and, secondly, The *end* for which we do it. If any habit, therefore, do not incline and dispose the will unto the proper end of duty, as well as

[14] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.468, 469, 482, 502-503. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4. Aquinas connects the goal of virtue in the life of the believer with the nature of virtue as a disposition (*habitus operativus*). "The end of virtue, since it is an operative habit, is its very activity. Yet observe that among operative habits some, such as vicious habits, always go to evil, whereas others sometimes go to good, sometimes to evil. Opinion, for instance, goes to both the true and the untrue. Virtue, however, is a habit which is always for good. Hence the distinction of virtue from those habits which are always for evil is expressed in the phrase, *of which one lives righteously*; and its distinction from those which are sometimes for good, and sometimes for evil, in the phrase, *of which no one makes bad* use. Finally, God is the efficient cause of the infused virtues, to which this definition applies, and this is expressed in the phrase, *which God works in us without us*." *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23,* 1a2ae, 55.4. For more on the distinction of purposes between acquired virtue and infused virtue, particularly as it relates to Protestant appropriation of Aristotle's framework see Sebastian Rehnman, "Moral Philosophy and Moral Theology in Vermigli," *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism,* ed by Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, & Jason Zuidema, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 199-214.

> unto the duty itself, it is not of that kind from whence true gospel obedience doth proceed; for the end of every act of gospel obedience,—which is the glory of God in Jesus Christ,—is essential unto it.[15]

All that humans do must be for specific purposes in Owen's theology. As the end of a disposition is key in determining what sort of disposition it is, so the end of human acts determines the sort of acts they are.[16] The goal for which humans act is key in determining the ultimate rightness or wrongness of their actions.[17] Genuinely right actions need right purposes. For Aristotle, the end of virtue is happiness which flows from a rightly ordered soul. In Owen's theology, the great goal and purpose of humanity and the reason for the creation of humanity in the first place is this "everlasting communion with God."[18] While Aquinas points to the beatific vision as the great end of humanity, Owen looks to communion with God as humanity's purpose in existence. Infused and renewed dispositions are given to believers for this purpose, that they may help believers respond in all their faculties towards a right end.

Not only is a focus on ends or purposes important, Owen also points to the need to distinguish between immediate and ultimate ends when considering action.[19] The immediate end of an action may be something good in itself. Owen uses the example of giving money to the poor. But if the ultimate goal is human merit or praise, then the act, though in itself virtuous, is ultimately worthless. The end for which and the means through which the act is committed determines whether or not it is ultimately virtuous.[20] Pursuing right action without considering right ends and means is, at least from a Christian perspective, futile. No matter

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[15] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.503.
[16] Owen points to the canonical story of Cain and Abel as an example of this. See *Pneumatologia*, 3.528, also 474. For more on the trinitarian nature of ends in Owen's theology see Ryan McGraw, "John Owen's Trinitarian Theology and Piety," in *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* ed by Willem Van Vlastuin & Kelly M. Kapic, 196-200.
[17] See Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Christian Faith*, 107-108.
[18] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.162.
[19] Ibid. 503.
[20] Owen's protection against an "ends justifies the means" approach is that the act itself must be virtuous as well. Both the act and the end must be right. It is not possible, in Owen's theology, to commit sinful acts for ultimately good purposes. However, one may commit good acts for ultimately sinful purposes. The distinction only works one way. See ibid. 503-505.

how many good acts a person does, if they are not directed towards divine ends through divinely enabled means, then they are of no ultimate value to a person. This does not mean that Owen has no place for moral virtue that is directed towards human ends. On the contrary, he speaks very positively about such action. Rather than considering "moral virtue" a problematic concept, Owen expresses his desire to see it increase. A "love to virtue itself and a conviction of its usefulness" is valuable to Owen.[21] More moral behaviour among humanity is a good thing: "Hence some would have moral virtue to be holiness, which, as they suppose, they can understand by their own reason and practise in their own strength; and I heartily wish that we could see more of the fruits of it from them."[22] The horizontal use of the natural virtues is not itself undesirable, yet it is insufficient to account for the divine ends entailed in divinely infused virtue. To mistake moral virtue as the entirety of gospel holiness is to miss Owen's emphasis on the necessity of right ends for truly virtuous actions.

The goal of the Holy Spirit's work in sanctification is to draw humans into a continually greater communion with God.[23] Believers only function properly in this communion with God.[24] This is the purpose for which humanity was created.[25] Believers are meant to commune with the Divine, and this can only take place in conjunction with the work of sanctification. The Divine cannot commune with that which is defiled, thus the goal of the whole Christian life is to be sanctified for the purpose of growth in union and communion with God. The ultimate goal for Christians is to bring glory to God, but the immediate end for believers, the way in which they accomplish that ultimate goal in the present, is the process of sanctification.[26] If a person does not have the ultimate end of God's glory in view in a

[21] Ibid. 576.
[22] Ibid. 480.
[23] Owen, *On Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* 2.267.
[24] Owen, *On the Nature, Power, Prevalency, and Deceit of Sin in Believers,* 6.238.
[25] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae,* 12.162.
[26] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.504, 386.

particular action, then that action cannot be considered virtuous.[27] Rightly ordered immediate ends also include an eye toward the ultimate end. Why does Owen focus so much on purposes and ends?

Owen illustrates the importance of this character in a striking way. Virtue, or the perfection of dispositions, is responsible for genuine freedom for human beings. Freedom, in Owen's theology, is not the ability to do whatever one wishes without constraint. Instead it is the power to live according to the will of God. "This power in the will consists in its liberty, freedom, and ability to consent unto, choose, and embrace, spiritual things. Believers have free will unto that which is spiritually good."[28] The process of dispositional change that virtue entails is key to human freedom and flourishing in Owen's thought. The concept of virtue continually suggests the necessity of human dispositions being perfected. What are they being perfected from? Sinful tendencies which restrict and enslave human nature in patterns of thinking, acting, and feeling that lead away from the purpose for which God created humanity. The perfection of these dispositions is why the dispositions were given to believers in the first place, so that the whole human nature may be freed through the re-creating power of the Holy Spirit.

How does virtue bring about this perfection? Owen's answer is to describe the change the Spirit brings across all three faculties of human nature: the mind, the will, and the affections. Owen's comment on freedom points to the consent of the will, the choice of the mind, and the embrace of the affections towards the things of God. There must be virtuous thinking, virtuous willing, and virtuous feeling in order for this perfection to be complete, and it is this change in these faculties that produces right action in believers.[29] If believers want to

[27] Ibid. 503.
[28] Ibid. 494. See David Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom,* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2010), passim.
[29] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.568.

see change in their actions, then it is essential for them to consider the concept of virtue, in order to understand and to pursue the right functioning of their dispositions.

This is one of the primary reasons Owen treats the concept of "moral virtue" with such hostility.[30] He sees it, at least as it was commonly used in his day, as having the wrong goal. Throughout Owen's chapter on regeneration he repeatedly denies that regeneration is primarily about a "moral reformation" in the believer.[31] He calls pursuing sanctification "unto the end of a self-righteousness" as "the soul and substance of all false religion in the world."[32] This is not because Owen has any problem with moral reformation in the lives of believers. On the contrary, he clearly states that morality is something demanded of Christians.[33] Moral virtue itself, then, cannot be the problem.[34] Owen's concern is instead with Christian leaders confusing gospel holiness with a sort of virtue that consists entirely of "the improvement of men's natural abilities in the exercise of moral virtue."[35] This comment refers to naturally

[30] In *Pneumatologia* Owen refers to "moral virtue" as a "putid figment" (p.11), a product of those who "have a mind to turn Pagans" (p.200), "the old Pelagian ambiguous expressions" (p.201), "legal righteousness" (p.376), the teaching of those who "betray their prodigious ignorance" (p.429), a "rejection of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" that others "do endeavour to substitute in the room thereof" (p.473), "sparks" that are "remaining in the ruins of depraved nature" (p.474), that which is "animated much with zeal, and set off with a profession of the most rigid mortification," but a product of those "whose hearts and consciences are not thus purged by the blood of Christ" (p.506), the result of "that horrible mixture of ignorance and impudence" (p.524), "the fulsome product of pride and ignorance" (p.565), and a merely "outward show and pretence" (p.568). Turretin is rather less harsh, yet he also argues that there is no sense in which "the virtues of the heathen" had any sort of ultimate goodness in them. See *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 10.5; 17.4.6.

[31] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.217, 219, 223.

[32] Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.7.

[33] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.525.

[34] Owen acknowledges the usefulness of the concept of moral virtue as something that has been brought into Christian theology from its origin in Aristotle. Though he seems somewhat pessimistic about its having been brought into Christian theology in the first place, he sees no need to eliminate the concept at it stands. "If, then, the signification of the words be respected as usually taken, it is virtue in men's manners that is intended. The schoolmen brought this expression with all its concerns, as they did the rest of Aristotle's philosophy, into the church and divinity; and I cannot but think it had been well if they had never done it, as all will grant they might have omitted some other things without the least disadvantage to learning or religion. However, this expression of 'moral virtue' having absolutely possessed itself of the fancies and discourses of all, and, it may be, of the understanding of some, though with very little satisfaction when all things are considered, I shall not endeavour to dispossess it or eliminate it from the confines of Christian theology. Only, I am sure had we been left unto the Scripture expressions of 'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, of the fear of God, of holiness, righteousness, living unto God, walking with God, and before him,' we might have been free from many vain, wordy perplexities, and the whole wrangle of this chapter in particular had been utterly prevented; for let but the Scripture express what it is to be religious, and there will be no contesting about the difference or no difference between grace and moral virtue." Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, 13.412-413.

[35] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.211. Socinianism also had a particular emphasis on human ability to act virtuously. The connection between virtue and Socinian ways of conceiving of human righteousness was also a significant

acquired abilities and temporal rather than divine ends. In other words, Owen understands "moral virtue" to be a human centred and human purposed sort of sanctification, in which case Christianity becomes a matter of merely a change in conduct. This idea was troubling to Owen, for it makes the entirety of human life about merely human ends. An insufficient *telos* in something so significant and regular as the mortification of sin "constantly produces the deplorable issues of superstition, self-righteousness, and anxiety of conscience in them who take the burden which is so bound for them."[36] Even in believers, having the wrong end in view frustrates believers in their process of sanctification and robs them of Christian comfort.

A change in conduct is not the primary goal of the Christian life, though through the Spirit's work in sanctification one's conduct is certainly changed. A change in behaviour is a consequence of the purpose rather than the purpose itself. The necessity and efficacy of regeneration in believers, however, point to a much greater life than is possible through merely human effort. "Such a spiritual, heavenly, supernatural life, so denominated from its nature, causes, acts, and ends, we must be partakers of in this world, if ever we mind to attain eternal life in another."[37] Here Owen summarises the whole of *Pneumatologia* in these few words: "heavenly life: its nature, causes, acts, and ends." The entire goal of *Pneumatologia* is to describe how the Holy Spirit fits believers for the divine blessedness experienced by believers both in seed form during their earthly existence and more fully in the heavenly life. The nature of that life is the Spirit's work through regeneration. The cause is the work of the Holy Spirit. The acts of that life are what Owen refers to as "evangelical obedience" or a divinely accepted form of holiness shown in the practicalities of the believer's daily life.[38] Moral virtue, as Owen perceives his opponents using it, makes the whole of the argument over just the one category: acts, and even then, in a prohibitively limited and wrongly focused

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contributor to Owen's apparent antipathy to the concept of virtue. See Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, 15-22.

[36] Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.3.

[37] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.473.

[38] Ibid. 470, 471, 500, 502, 520, 526.

sense. The *telos* of sanctification, however, is life forever with the triune God. Owen sees regeneration as being preoccupied with divine ends and "moral virtue" as being focused solely on human ends.

In other words, making regeneration only about moral virtue reduces a divinely purposed and glorious work to a focus solely on acts, acts which humans are led to believe they can accomplish themselves, when in reality they are still helpless. And if humans are unable to participate in true spiritual life in this earthly existence, then they will also be unable to participate in it in the life eternal. Making regeneration primarily about humanly enabled moral virtue is to miss the larger picture in view. Owen wants to talk about God's divine purposes in humanity as realised through the trinitarian work of regeneration, with an emphasis on the Spirit's work of conversion and universal renewal in the life of believers. His opponents, however, keep getting hung up on morality, and of the sort that they can accomplish themselves apart from divine assistance. Of course, there is morality involved in moral virtue, but Owen wants to talk about something much bigger: the work of renovation in believers that prepares them to behold the Divine for all eternity.

Owen is also concerned that a wrong perspective on moral virtue plays into the hands of those he sees as offering Pelagian views of God's work in humanity.[39] Through his writings he regularly deals with Pelagian tendencies and *Pneumatologia* is no exception. Owen accuses both Socinians and Pelagians of muddying the waters of theological discussion to hide their heterodox views.[40] He fears that this tendency will result in a neglect of the role of the Holy Spirit.[41] Owen also sees his opponents as overemphasising human ability in redemption to the exclusion and diminishment of God's grace.[42] A proper understanding of

[39] Owen accuses his opponent Samuel Parker's rejection of the distinction between grace and moral virtue as being a sort of "Pelagianism that Pelagius himself never did not durst avow." In *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, 13.425.
[40] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.219-220, 243, 245.
[41] Ibid. 8, 300, 387.
[42] Ibid. 201, 223, 292, 308, 515.

the purpose and place of Christian character in the life of the believer is a key aspect of Owen's emphasis on the Spirit's work of regeneration.

An improper emphasis on moral virtue also fails to account for the distinct way God works with his people under the new covenant.[43] While it is true that the moral duties of the covenant of works are impressed upon believers, to make their duty only that which is contained in the covenant of works is to minimise or even miss completely the importance of Christ's work in his incarnation and atonement. While the goal of virtue is the same under both covenants, the means of reaching that goal is radically different.[44] Both covenants point God's people towards eternal happiness, yet in the new covenant that goal is only attainable through Christ's work and by the power of the Spirit put into believers through a work of infusion.

This divine end is in view in every aspect of human functionality. A divine purpose is what motivates every aspect of life for the Christian, and it stands behind the whole of the process of sanctification. Even the focus on a concept such as obedience is changed from merely following rules to pursuing divine ends.

> And, indeed, the holy obedience of believers, as hath been declared at large before, is a thing quite of another kind than any thing in the world which, by the rules, principles, and light of nature, we are directed unto or instructed in. It is spiritual, heavenly, mysterious, filled with principles and actings of the same kind with those whereby our communion with God in glory unto eternity shall be maintained.[45]

Gospel obedience flows from a divinely infused gracious disposition, and it is this disposition which continually inclines the believer towards godly purposes in sanctification. Each faculty of human nature needs a new disposition because each faculty must be focused on this one goal. As a result of the Spirit's work of infusing virtue, now the mind is focused on communion with God, the will chooses that which brings greater communion with God, and the affections are drawn towards that communion as the greatest good. Christian character is

[43] Ibid. 526.
[44] Ibid. 526.
[45] Ibid. 649.

not merely a matter of doing virtuous deeds; it is a matter of being virtuous throughout the entire triad of one's faculties. Rather than sanctification being about moral virtue for virtue's sake, that which is pursued for merely natural ends through purely natural means, sanctification is instead about inclining these human dispositions that are anterior to human acts towards divine goals through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Owen's adaptation of Aquinas' ethics is notable in that it keeps the continuity of focus on ends or goals rather than dealing primarily with rules. Romanus Cessario has noted that developing casuistry separately from key tenets of Christian faith, such as took place in the Roman Catholic Church following the Council of Trent, had a withering effect on ethics.[46] Casuistry as a branch of ethics came to be associated with the sort of manipulation of ethics, specifically among the Jesuits, which Blaise Pascal attacked in his *Provincial Letters (1657).*[47] It was seen, at its best, as dealing with broad "questions about what was forbidden or permitted, rather than about what it would be morally and spiritually *best* for the individual to do."[48] Though casuistry as a discipline was intended to be engaged in conjunction with the rest of the theological disciplines, its goal was never "to create or transform character."[49]

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[46] Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 49-50, 153-162. Cessario also points to the prevalence of "ethical models based upon divine command or rule theories, usually moderated by the principle of proportional reason" as both a contemporary example of this problem and a demonstration of the superiority of Aquinas' ethical formulation, in *The Moral Virtues*, 13-14.

[47] Owen references this work in his writings. See *The Animadversions on "Fiat Lux,"* 14.191; *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, 17.203-204. Thomas Wood has pointed out that though this negative stereotype of Jesuit casuistry was not necessarily the result of serious Protestant interaction with Jesuit treatments on ethics, it did come about as a result of the Jesuit focus on "casuistical divinity as exclusively preoccupied with law (more especially when law is regarded as an external imposition)." In *English Casuistical Divinity*, 65; see also 59-66. For a similar verdict see Johann P. Sommerville, "The 'new art of lying': equivocation, mental reservation, and casuistry," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed by Edmund Letters, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 159-160; Jill Kraye concurs as well, though she also points out how protestant casuists differed from the Jesuits both in their approach and their goal in casuistry, in "Conceptions of moral philosophy," in *The Cambridge history of seventeenth-century philosophy*, edited by Daniel Garber, Michael Ayers, with the assistance of Roger Ariew and Alan Gabbey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1298-1300. For an attempt to redeem casuistry from Pascal's condemnation and to even argue that Pascal himself was philosophically incorrect to argue against casuistry in the way he did, see Albert R. Jonson and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988).

[48] Edmund Leites, "Casuistry and character," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed by Edmund Leites, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988),120.

[49] Leites, "Casuistry and character," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, 120.

Owen's writings on sanctification are, however, distinctly teleological rather than case driven.[50] Casuistry, at least insofar as it deals with general ethical prescriptions, is a noticeably absent element in his writings. It is important not to push a distinction between ethics as end-focused and ethics as casuistry too far. As the early reformation rhetoric against scholasticism mellowed into a renewed appreciation of the scholastic method by the end of the 16th century, so too was there a largely rhetorical aspect to many of the scathing denunciations of casuistry. Much Reformed Orthodox casuistry was produced as a result of a genuine desire among pastors to help their flock respond to the various troubling circumstances that arose in daily life.[51] This pastoral concern forms the basis of a somewhat different sort of casuistry of which the Puritans made frequent use and which was called "cases of conscience."[52] In that sense then, casuistry, or the focus on aiding the conscience of believers, is actually a uniquely pastoral duty. Consider Richard Baxter's weekly meetings in which he opened his home to congregants so he could hear their understandings of the previous week's sermon and answer their questions of application of the sermon to their daily

[50] See Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated,* 13.490; *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed,* 11.513; Owen himself points out that case-driven casuistry is not nearly as useful as a wise and compassionate teleology in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.85-86. See volumes 6 and 9 of Owen's works for more on his dealing with cases of conscience and for evidence of Owen's own approach as more ends focused than case driven. For a brief survey of casuistry as dealing pre-eminently with cases of conscience in a largely reformed context in early modern Britain see Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity During the Seventeenth Century,* passim.

[51] Luca Baschera, "Ethics in Reformed Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy,* ed by Herman J. Selderhuis, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 547. For similarities between the Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches in casuistry see Carl Trueman, "The impact of the Reformation and emerging modernism," in *The Bible and Pastoral Practice,* ed by Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 88-91.

[52] For the development of British casuistry see James, F. Keenan, S.J., "William Perkins (1558-1602) and the Birth of British Casuistry," in *The Context of Casuistry,* ed by James F. Keenan, S.J. and Thomas a Shannon, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 105-130. Meg Lota Brown points out that Protestant casuists "insisted that the answers to dilemmas should be sought in Scripture before they are sought in institutions or other individuals. All Christians were encouraged to be their own casuists." in "The Politics of Conscience in Reformation England," in *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. XV, no. 2 (1991), 102. For distinctions between British and Continental forms of casuistry see James, F. Keenan, S.J., "Jesuit Casuistry or Jesuit Spirituality? The Roots of Seventeenth-Century British Puritan Practical Divinity," in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts 1540-1773,* ed by John W. O'Malley S.J., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 627-640, though Keenan seems to rely on the now outdated "Calvin versus the Calvinists" thesis to describe the necessity of casuistry in a reformed context.

lives.[53] While Owen published nothing like Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory,* a work intended as a comprehensive manual for the whole of Christian life and experience, he did write a number of treatments dealing with "cases of conscience."[54] Even in Owen's treatments of Christian fellowship or pursuing spiritual mindedness, treatments in which he provides lists of "rules," Owen follows early puritan theologian William Perkins in providing "a strong teleological view of ethics," or, giving rules that are end-focused aims rather than precise descriptions of specific behaviours to repeat or avoid.[55] He states in his works on sanctification that his purpose is to aid believers in their pursuit of communion with God.[56] A Christian focus on virtue is only rightly balanced when the goal is happiness that comes from the beatific vision.[57]

So, is there then a dichotomy between sanctification as conformity to God's will through obedience to a law and sanctification as communion with God in Owen's theology? Some have claimed so and have placed Owen firmly in the former setting rather than the

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[53] See Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity During the Seventeenth Century*, ix-xiii. Wood points out that this sort of casuistry was also ends-driven, as the goal of such counsel was "to give men a vision of the love and holiness of God, that they might grow more sensitive to the enormity of human sin; to incite them to a clearer discernment of their own sins, and a heartier detestation of them; to lead men on to that godly sorrow which is true contrition, and to build them up in the grace of the Lord Jesus by the cultivation of pious habits; so that their consciences might not only be examined but illuminated, their motives and intentions not only scrutinized but purified. In a word, to ensure not only that their actions might be lawful, but that their lives might be holy." *English Casuistical Divinity,* xii.

[54] Baxter states that "the resolving of practical cases of conscience" is "the great work of this treatise." In *The Christian Directory*, 3. He further connects his project to the writings of other noted casuists such as the puritan William Ames, specifically in his *Cases of Conscience*, English Roman Catholic theologian Gregory Sayrus, Jesuits Alfonso Rodriguez and Franciscus Toletus, and the Portuguese physician Juan de Matos Fragoso. But, again, it is important not to create too wide a gap between teleology and casuistry, as Baxter begins his *Christian Directory* by reminding the reader that the purpose of the volume is for the believer to "know, and love, and serve his Maker, and by adhering to him in this life of trial, *to attain to the blessed sight and enjoyment of his glory in the life to come*, hath not been wanting to furnish him with such necessaries, *without which these ends could not successfully be sought*" in Baxter, *The Christian Directory,* 7 (emphasis mine).

[55] See Owen, *Eshcol: a Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.53-87, and *On the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded,* 7.308-331, 379-394; but even in these lists of "rules" Owen is giving general direction rather than making precise ethical prescriptions, and he is still focused on strengthening the dispositions of mind, will, and affections to more fully enable the pursuit of right goals. See James, F. Keenan, S.J., "William Perkins (1558-1602) and the Birth of British Casuistry," in *The Context of Casuistry,* 124.

[56] Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.3.

[57] See Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 17-21. Aquinas' pattern in the *Summa* argues that ethics only makes sense, at least in a Christian setting, when it is intimately connected to the rest of the branches of Christian theology. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth,* 26-27.

latter.[58] But this is to read Owen selectively rather than holistically. Though Owen does repeatedly focus on sanctification, it is of crucial importance to understand what he means by sanctification, rather than importing present-day understandings of the concept into Owen's writings. For Owen, the purpose of sanctification is to make believers able to live for God's purposes for them, to fit them for the sort of life God intends for them.[59] He clearly connects both "acts of obedience unto God" and "communion with [God]" as the primary reasons for the necessity of sanctification.[60] Conformity to God's will is neither the means of sanctification – that is the Holy Spirit's work of renovation – nor is it the only goal of sanctification: the other goal is communion with God. Yet conformity to God's will is one of the purposes of sanctification in Owen's theology and it is inseparably tied to communion with God.

Communion with God is not an abstract notion entirely apart from Christian life. It is instead directly tied to a significant change in the nature of the believer, one which is demonstrated through transformation in the faculties of the soul and resulting in right action. Communion and conformity are inextricably related in Owen. He uses the phrase "communion with God" more frequently in his volume on sanctification then he does in his volume on communion with God. In other words, conformity to God's will and communion with God are two sides of the same coin in Owen's theology of sanctification. Communion

[58] Daniel Westburg writes of Owen's development of infused dispositions, "When we compare Aquinas's description of the work of the Holy Spirit in producing virtues of faith, hope, and love, which affects and perfects human intellect, will, and emotion and then transforms the moral virtues (humanly acquired) as well, this seems very different from the habit of holiness as the capacity to obey God which Owen described. Instead of a primary virtue (charity) drawing us into fellowship and union with God, we have virtue that enables us to be obedient." In "The Influence of Aquinas on Protestant Ethics," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed by Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 273-274. Westburg makes several strange and inaccurate statements about Owen's view of infused dispositions that seem to indicate he has only read Owen through Christopher Cleveland's work. See also Ron Frost's simplistic comparison between Richard Sibbes' anthropology and William Perkin's appropriation of Aquinas' ethics in "The Bruised Reed," in *The Devoted Life*, 88-89. Owen, however, explicitly connects the infused virtues with dispositions of the mind, will, and affections, and he clearly points out that the end or purpose of these virtues is not merely obedience to God but rather God himself. See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.528-529. He also points to the "spiritual habits of faith and love" as the way the Holy Spirit "excites" the dispositions of believers "unto frequent actings" of holiness. See Ibid. 388.

[59] Ibid. 482.

[60] Ibid. 484.

with God directs the goal of conformity and conformity informs what that communion looks like in the believer's life. They are parallel and complementary emphases rather than opposites. Both are necessary for the believer and they fit necessarily together. Pitting law against communion in Owen's theology of sanctification is to miss his twin focus on the goal of sanctification including both aspects of states and ends.

**Responding Through Virtue**

The importance of ends or goals in the concept of disposition shows the importance of a right concept of virtue. Owen refers to virtue and the virtues are the specific ways humans work towards the perfection of a disposition. More simply put, goals, ends, and purposes in Owen's development of disposition point to the "why" in the concept. Virtue addresses the "how." Though considered from the divine perspective the Holy Spirit renovates human nature by his grace, considered from the human perspective sanctification necessarily involves a human response to divine action. This response takes place through divinely enabled means given to the believer as a result of the Spirit's infusion of a gracious disposition to the faculties of mind, will, and affections. It is through the category of infused virtue that Owen puts a priority on the human involvement in the work of renovation.

If virtue is a perfected disposition, then a right disposition is a necessary component for a person to be able to function well. It is an essential part of developing Christian character rather than an optional extra. God gives such a disposition to believers as a key means by which they pursue their communion with him. In Owen's theology humanity is created with the capacity for improvement, but because of sin human faculties are naturally disordered. A complete transformation is necessary for humans to be enabled to act well. Through regeneration human faculties have been renewed and are now in a state that can be improved: but how does this dispositional improvement take place? Owen and Aquinas both

emphasise that the human side of regeneration takes place through the development of Christian character. Virtue is the ability to produce acts in keeping with the character of the infused disposition. There are several ways Owen makes use of various virtue categories in his theology of sanctified responses.

First, both Owen and Aquinas point to virtue as that which powers action or enables a particular act. In other words, dispositions are infused to believers to produce the perfection of their dispositions according to God-ward purposes. Owen states, "virtue" consists of "power or ability to continue the principle of life in suitable acts of it, with respect unto the whole obedience required of him."[61] He speaks of the Holy Spirit working in the original creation, imbuing the new earth with "a quickening and prolific virtue, inlaying it with the seeds of animal life unto all kinds of things"[62] Thus in Owen's development, virtue is power in the sense of "the capacity…to accomplish change."[63]

Owen is clear that infused virtue, or power and ability for godly living which is received by faith on the part of the believer, is something that results in a change of action in the capacities for thinking, feeling, and choosing. Through the infused disposition a believer is given a faculty which "stirs us up unto our utmost endeavours and diligence…for the preventing of the defilements of sin."[64] Thus infused virtue results in a moral transformation of one's life without consisting only in that moral transformation. A disposition of Christian character in the process of being perfected is a gift of grace received by faith. This gift is infused in the believer, which then also involves the responsibility of the believer to seek after Christ, through faith, and improve this disposition for the glory of God.

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[61] Ibid. 285. That Owen is using these terms somewhat synonymously is evidenced by his statement that the third aspect of the "life which God requires" Owen wished to explore is "virtue; or habit, act, and power." Ibid. 284-285.
[62] Ibid. 98.
[63] Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological*, 231.
[64] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.446.

As virtue is power, it is the means which enables the ongoing process of sanctification in the believer's life. Virtue is dispositional power which enables sanctified acts. Through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit the disposition produces instinctual and habitual virtue in the believer. This ingraining is similar to how natural habits are developed, as repeated action in the same path produces both a consistency and facility over time. However, Owen is clear that the only way this disposition can come to the believer and remain in the believer is through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. "And the reason hereof is, because the spring of it is in our head, Christ Jesus, it being only an emanation of virtue and power from him unto us by the Holy Ghost."[65] Virtue in the believer is a result of the work of God and the gift of his grace. It is only through that grace that moral uprightness becomes gospel holiness rather than resulting in mere "moral virtue." The development of virtue is an essential part of the process of change for Christians. But Owen is concerned to emphasise that the sort of virtue which stems from the work of Christ *will* result in change in the life of the believer. In other words, virtue must be infused rather than acquired to result in sanctifying change in a believer. But once virtue has been infused, then the disposition is strengthened through repetition of the acts which fit with virtue.

But a focus on action should not be interpreted as merely external action. Actions flow from natures, so virtuous actions come from a virtuous nature. One cannot produce truly virtuous acts from a debased and unregenerated nature. A gracious disposition is a central part of the believer being able to be sanctified. Owen makes a clear point of this. It is through this new gracious disposition that believers are "enabled to live unto God, and perform that obedience which he requireth;" it is given so that believers are able to aid in "all duties of obedience in our walking before God;" the disposition is provided to "dispose the mind," and that disposition "enables [the believer] to live unto God in all holy obedience."[66] In this,

[65] Ibid. 475.
[66] Ibid. 472.

Owen shows that living in gospel obedience is not distinct from either living by faith or living toward the beatific goal, and in fact, living in this gospel obedience because of the new disposition is something the believer inclines towards.

He describes this sort of sanctified obedience as a state rather than merely a pattern of action.

> Sanctification, as here described is the immediate work of God by his Spirit upon our whole nature, proceeding from the peace made for us by Jesus Christ, whereby, being changed into his likeness, we are kept entirely in peace with God, and are preserved unblamable, or in a state of gracious acceptation with him, according to the terms of the covenant, unto the end.[67]

States deal with the concept of being, and only then involve actions that accompany states. This "state of gracious acceptation" flows from the gift of a new nature. The new nature in turn, produces acts that are consonant with the character of this new nature. Sanctification is a matter of being before it becomes a matter of action. Someone may live virtuously, at least according to the cardinal virtues, and not be sanctified nor be in a state of grace. Conversely, because of the presence and impact of indwelling sin, believers may be truly sanctified and yet not currently live virtuous lives, though Owen acknowledges that this is neither a desirable nor a safe state for believers to be in. Sanctification does result in virtue in believers, and it does so from "firm dispositions and inclinations unto moral acts and duties."[68] Dispositions flow from one's nature, thus sanctification flows not from one's actions but from a new nature given to believers by God.[69] This distinction is theologically important for Owen. His writings on the importance of virtue as a consequence of the new disposition show his insistence that although believers must live virtuous lives, virtuous

[67] Ibid. 369.
[68] Ibid. 482.
[69] Turretin also points this new nature as that which produces "an habitual change in qualities," in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 17.1.4-7.

action flows from knowing that through Christ believers are now in a "state of grace."[70] Sanctification is first a matter of being before it results in doing.

Second, Owen points to the usefulness of the virtues for the process of sanctification in believers. Owen's apparent antipathy to moral virtue shouldn't be confused as an opposition to Christians making use of the virtues for their sanctification. While Owen's overt language concerning virtue serves a polemical purpose, a closer look at his writings shows that he stands in close continuity with Aquinas on the subject of the virtues and their necessity for Christian growth. While a superficial reading of Aquinas on the virtues might lead one to conclude that his emphasis on the moral virtues is simply a repackaging of Aristotle's treatment of the subject, such an approach would miss both the finer details of Aquinas' treatment of the virtues and the context in which he develops the virtues.

Part 1a2ae of *Summa Theologiae* begins with a discussion on humanity's ultimate happiness found only in God and ends by exploring the topic of God's grace. It is in the middle of this section that Aquinas begins to explore the virtues. The context surrounding Aquinas' discussion of the virtues shows that while he depends significantly on Aristotle for definitions and ordering of the virtues, he also builds upon this Aristotelian structure in a distinctly Christian manner. To Aquinas, virtue, or at least truly Christian virtue, is directed towards divine ends and requires divine help. Infused virtues are those which must have God as their object, can only be understood through divine revelation, and must come from a divine rather than human source.[71] To say it slightly differently, virtue is the graciously enabled means by which Christians continually grow to attain the happiness in God that is their ultimate end. Aristotle also pointed moral virtue at happiness, but his happiness did not include any notion of beholding the divine or an eternal bliss in paradise. Aquinas is doing something distinctly different. This significant difference is further demonstrated by the fact

[70] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.406.
[71] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.62.2-3.

that in Aquinas' most significant development of the virtues, section 2a2ae of *Summa Theologiae*, the moral virtues are explored only after the theological virtues have been expounded. As others have pointed out, this important ordering shows that Aquinas is not even using the moral virtues in precisely the same way as Aristotle.[72] Aquinas is dealing with infused and divinely enabled forms of the moral virtues that are a part of a distinctly Christian formation of character. Not only is growth in Christian character important for the believer, but both the theological and the cardinal or moral virtues are a key part of how God accomplishes this change. Growth as a process rather than a state is in view in Aquinas' exploration of the virtues is clear from the fact that both *Summa Theologiae* and *Disputed Questions on Virtue* address the question of whether dispositions and virtues can be increased.[73]

Owen's approach to the virtues follows Aquinas' appropriation of Aristotelian thought. His apparent pessimism about moral virtue and its relationship to the concept of Christian morality is aimed towards a view of moral virtue, or simply morality, that is acquired through human effort alone and is responsible for humans' enablement to attain a natural form of human good or happiness.[74] This for Owen is at best Pelagianism and at worst sheer paganism. Both Aquinas an Owen are keen to distinguish a purely Aristotelian view of moral virtue from a Christian concept of growth in God's grace. Aristotle's naturally sourced disposition fits within human reason and stems from human ability.[75] These virtues are

[72] See Andrew Pinsent, "Robert Miner's *Aquinas on the Passions*," in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. February 2010; "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 475-488. This emphasis is also repeated in Aquinas' *Disputed Questions on Virtue,* passim.
[73] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.52; *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, "On the virtues in general," article 11.
[74] His references to the cardinal virtues as a group are largely negative, calling them merely "some seeds and sparks" amidst the "ruins of depraved nature." Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.474. See also *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel,* 7.109. Owen omits prudence from his list of justice, temperance, and fortitude as the latter are moral virtues and the former is an intellectual virtue. He does describe a variety of the cardinal virtues that comes from the Holy Spirit and is at work in the world apart from saving grace in *Pneumatologia,* 3.103, 126, 148; *A Discourse on Spiritual Gifts,* 4.425-426.
[75] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.62.2.

comprehensible to natural intellectual capacity apart from regeneration, and merely repeating the actions that produce them ingrains them in one's nature. Acting courageously over repeated instances will produce the virtue of courage in one's character, as moral virtues can be attained through repeated patterns of action. Though Owen emphasises that there is clearly value in this sort of virtue within society, he wants to distinguish sanctifying grace from a naturally acquired variety of the moral virtues. But he does still see a use for the cardinal virtues under the umbrella of God's infusion of virtue to believers through the Spirit's regenerating work of sanctification.

Aquinas claimed that the theological virtues of faith, hope and love were superior to the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. "Faith, hope, and charity surpass human virtue; for they are virtues of men as made partakers in divine grace," but this does not mean that the cardinal virtues are irrelevant to the concept of growth in grace.[76] While the theological virtues must be the product of a supernaturally infused disposition, faith, hope, and particularly love are essential for the development of moral virtue as well.[77] Only those who rely on the grace of God can truly be able to acquire and develop the moral virtues.[78] Any discussion of the moral virtues that did not begin with the grace of God was a non-starter from both Owen and Aquinas' points of view. Hence Owen distinguishes between Aristotle and himself on this aspect of the concepts of disposition and virtue.[79]

Owen clearly emphasises the necessity of both the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues, but as in Aquinas it is from the theological virtues that the cardinal virtues can be developed in a distinctly Christian manner.[80] From the power given through the theological

[76] *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23,* 1a2ae, 58.3.
[77] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.63.1; Q.65.2.
[78] Aquinas seems to also include a species of divinely infused cardinal virtues. See Andrew Pinsent, "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 475-476.
[79] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.502.
[80] "So the graces of the Spirit, as faith, love, hope, in all their exercise, whatever they may have of morality in them, or however they may be exercised in and about moral things and duties, yet because of sundry respects wherein they exceed the sphere of morality, are called graces and duties, theological, spiritual, supernatural, evangelical, divine; in opposition unto all such habits of the mind and duties as, being required by the law of

virtues then the cardinal virtues are able to be strengthened as well. Owen protests those who think that accomplishing moral duties or going through religious rituals is sufficient to produce Christian character.

> In like manner, in the duties of piety and religion, in acts of outward obedience unto God, men by the same means may so accustom themselves unto them as to have an habitual disposition unto their exercise. I doubt not but that it is so unto a high degree with many superstitious persons. But in all these things the acts do still precede the habits of the same nature and kind, which are produced by them and not otherwise.[81]

Merely producing morally upright action is not the same as true virtue, for as Aquinas points out, the "power of those inborn principles [moral virtues] does not go beyond the measure of nature. Consequently, in order to be set towards his supernatural end, a man needs to be endowed with additional springs of activity."[82] Even a "habitual disposition" for religious activity has far more to do with naturally acquired virtue than graciously infused virtue in both Owen's and Aquinas' thought.

What do the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues have to do with sanctification in Owen's theology? It is through the exercise of the theological virtues that believers are

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nature, and as they are so required, are merely moral." Ibid. 525. Owen's point on the theological virtues "exceeding morality" should be taken to show that graciously infused virtue comes before acquired virtue, not that it comes completely apart from acquired virtue. God is the ultimate goal of the infused virtues whereas humanity is in view with the acquired virtues. In one sense, the theological virtues represent the first table of the law, and the cardinal virtues represent the second table. Aquinas hints at this distinction in *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.63.4, but Owen makes it explicit, connecting "moral virtue" with those of the 10 Commandments that deal with relationships between humans. "Generally, moral virtues are esteemed to be the duties of the second table: for although those who handle these matters more accurately do not so straiten or confine them, yet it is certain that in vulgar and common acceptation (which strikes no small stroke in the regulating of the conceptions of the wisest men about the signification of words) nothing else is intended by "moral virtues," or "duties of morality," but the observation of the precepts of the second table; nor is any thing else designed by those divines who, in their writings, so frequently declare that it is not morality alone that will render men acceptable to God. Others do extend these things farther, and fix the denomination of moral firstly upon the law or rule of all those habits of the mind and its operations which afterward thence they call moral. Now, this moral law is nothing but the law of nature, or the law of our creation, which the apostle affirms to lie equally obligatory on all men, even all the Gentiles themselves, Rom. 2:14, 15, and whereof the decalogue is summarily expressive." Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated,* 13.413. See Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen,* 96-99.

[81] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.474.

[82] *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 23,* 1a2ae, 63.3. "It is possible by means of human activity to acquire the moral virtues, in so far as they produce good deeds that are directed to an end which does not surpass the natural resources of man… But in so far as they produce good deeds bearing on a supernatural last end, thus they truly and perfectly have the character of virtue, and cannot be acquired by human acts, but are poured forth by God." Ibid. 65.2

continually sanctified and strengthened in their dispositions.[83] Faith, hope, and love are infused by the Spirit to enable believers to incline towards God. The theological virtues are necessary to keep believers focused upon divine purposes. The cardinal virtues are means by which believers are strengthened in their fight against sin. Owen connects fortitude with perseverance as essential for the strength necessary to continually fight against sin.[84] Temperance or self-denial enables one to withstand temptation and the desires of the flesh.[85] Prudence comes from being spiritually minded and is closely related to discernment.[86] These cardinal virtues stem from the Spirit's fruits of faith and love in believers and result in the believer being enabled to fulfil the duties of sanctification. Thus, virtues are not an optional extra for believers, either for Aquinas or Owen. Virtue and the virtues are essential components of believer's becoming rightly ordered in their inner selves. A Christian view of virtue draws on the Spirit's gifts and abilities infused into believers and points believers towards God's twofold intended purpose for them: the immediate happiness of having one's faculties function appropriately in this life and the ultimate happiness that is found in God's presence in the life to come.

Third, proper use of the virtues results in a right inclination in believers. This means that the virtuous person has both the power or ability and the desire to think, choose, feel, and act in ways that are distinctly different from a vicious person. Owen's use here is consistent with Aquinas' view that virtue is an "operative habit" of which "God is the efficient cause."[87]

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[83] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,* 15.462. See also Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,* 2.197; *Sermons,* 9.152; *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2.525; *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.20.
[84] Owen, *A Treatise on the Dominion of Sin and Grace*, 7.556.
[85] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.374. Owen's main use of temperance is in lists of the fruit of the Spirit. See ibid. 392, 534.
[86] Owen, *On the Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*, 7.269. Prudence is also required for believers to be able to be discerning concerning the evaluation of others' profession of faith and knowing how to care for souls troubled by their sin. See Owen, *A Discourse on the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 4.332-334; *An Exposition of Psalm 130,* 6.568-569. Owen's exploration of justice is largely constrained to the topic of divine justice, which he develops extensively in volume 10 of his collected works, and complaints about unjust treatments of Congregationalist churches from other denominations. See Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, 13.207-276; *A Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity,* 15.69.
[87] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1a2ae, Q.55.4.

Here again both Owen and Aquinas distinguish their view of virtue from a Pelagian ontology in their insistence that God must be the cause of any truly virtuous action or nature in the believer. Yet God-directed and God-empowered action necessarily results in a human response. If virtue is power that enables action towards a certain goal, then action is required for the demonstration of the presence of virtue. Now concepts of virtue based in purely human effort and accomplished for merely human ends are the sort of "moral virtue" Owen disdains.[88] Holy Spirit enabled and doxologically focused virtue, however, results in the sort of morality that can properly be referred to as gospel holiness.

Owen's action-directed disposition has as its seat an inclination written onto the hearts of regenerate humanity, hearts which have been and are being renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

> This new heart is a heart with the law of God written in it, as before mentioned; and this new spirit is the habitual inclination of that heart unto the life of God, or all duties of obedience. And herein the whole of what we have asserted is confirmed,—namely, that antecedently unto all duties and acts of holiness whatever, and as the next cause of them, there is by the Holy Ghost a new spiritual principle or habit of grace communicated unto us and abiding in us, from whence we are made and denominated holy.[89]

Owen points out that the gracious disposition results not only in right actions, but in a new nature which both desires and produces action for the right reasons. Through the process of regeneration, the Holy Spirit changes human nature. To focus on moral virtue as humanly sourced action is to emphasise behaviour and human ability alone. The Spirit's work, however, produces a new nature in which divinely renewed faculties produce not only moral behaviour but also an increasingly renovated and restored nature which continually and progressively inclines towards that renewal. Through acts a believer demonstrates the presence of a new nature and renewed faculties of mind, will, and affections, but the renewal

[88] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.524-527.
[89] Ibid. 477.

of these faculties precedes action, directs that action, and derives the source of action not from human means but from divine means.

> There is not only a moral but a physical immediate operation of the Spirit, by his power and grace, or his powerful grace, upon the minds or souls of men in their regeneration. This is that which we must cleave to, or all the glory of God's grace is lost, and the grace administered by Christ neglected.[90]

The purpose of the disposition is that the believer may be suitably changed according to the character of the new nature. The Spirit turns human nature towards himself, and in so doing, works upon the human will in a way that increases its willingness. Duties and obedience flows from that new nature and that nature is attracted to the character of God. It is through the gracious disposition that believers not only act virtuously, but also become truly virtuous throughout the whole of their being. It is this virtuousness of being that results in believers being able to produce godly living in their thinking, choosing, and feeling, but it also results in their inclination towards this further progression of godliness. For this reason, a new disposition received from God is a necessary component in order for the believer to be able to develop the desire to produce and grow in virtuous character.

Owen's theology of sanctification relies heavily on believers developing the right sorts of inclinations.[91] Learning to hate evil and love good requires training, but they result in instincts and habits that will serve believers well in the long run. This is why a dispositional understanding of sanctification is so important in Owen's development. Any understanding of sanctification that focuses primarily on acts or even self-sourced dispositions cannot properly direct human nature towards the right end to result in the sort of lasting change that Owen sees the scriptures as requiring. Only divine acting upon human nature can result in a God-ward inclination and an inclination towards God is precisely the sort of sanctification Owen expounds. Not only do believers act rightly, they also desire to be more and more like

[90] Ibid. 316. Owen's use of "the mind or souls" refers to his broader development of the triad of human nature.
[91] Owen describes this inclination to holiness as a matter of "instinct" which is implanted in believers by God. See ibid. 469, 475.

Christ. Their inclinations have been turned away from themselves and towards what God desires for them, that is, himself.

This is why Owen spends far more time writing about the need for sanctification by addressing his arguments to one of the faculties of the triad rather than simply reemphasising or repeating scriptural commands.[92] The goal is Christian obedience; Owen clearly believes in the importance of scripture's commands to believers. But how does that happen? Through the disposition strengthening each faculty in a God-ward direction after being graciously infused.

Owen writes to excite the affections towards the results of godly living in daily life. Positive desire is a significant component to his writings on sanctification. Christians should pursue virtue because of the blessing that God intends for those who are conformed to the image of his Son. Living in the fear of God, in Owen's theology, is what is best for God's people. An inclination only for self makes one miserable, but the gift of a new heart enables one to live how one was meant to live.

> The new heart, as hath been declared, is the new nature, the new creature, the new, spiritual, supernatural principle of holiness. The first effect, the first fruit hereof is, the fear of God always, or a new spiritual bent and inclination of soul unto all the will and commands of God. And this new spirit, this fear of God, is still expressed as the inseparable consequent of the new heart, or the writing of the law of God in our hearts, which are the same.[93]

Having rightly ordered affections, or "a *regard* unto God and his will, with a *reverence* due unto his nature, and a *delight* in him suited unto that covenant-relation wherein he stands unto us," is a key piece of Owen's motivation for the sanctification of believers.[94]

He encourages his readers to cultivate volitional strength so that they may withstand sinful temptations. Godly willpower is essential to believers being able to say no to sinful desires. He writes to warn the will against the impact of giving way to sin and falling into

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[92] See chapter 3 of Owen's *Of Temptation,* 6.101-117, or chapters 10, 11, and 12 of Owen's *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers,* 6.232-260 to see more on how he deals with each of these faculties.
[93] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.484.
[94] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

unbiblical patterns of life. Patience is a key part of this ability.[95] Patience, when faced with a difficult situation, enables believers to carefully determine the most biblical course of action, rather than simply run with an impetuous desire. The ability to hold against the temptation of the flesh, to resist the sinful desires that creep up in the heart, is an important function of the will.

Owen urges believers to think and meditate on what is true, to make decisions rationally according to the knowledge given in scripture rather than with what he describes as a "mind" that is "fleshly."[96] Believers are called to think well, to be able to respond with careful thought rather than merely emotional responses. Though believers are not rationalists, neither are they fideists. As cultivating the right use of the mind is especially important for believers to learn how to evaluate various theological viewpoints, scripture calls believers to be conformed to Jesus in the renewing of their minds. Learning to think carefully is a core piece of Owen's theology of sanctification. Not only is this a guard against dangerous theological influences from the outside, but it also has very personal results as well. Poor theological development quickly results in problematic patterns of action. Shoddy thinking in theology always leads to problems later, even if it is not immediately apparent through improper behaviour.[97] Experimental Christianity is as important as theologically precise doctrine.[98]

Owen describes the infused disposition as that which makes the "whole course of obedience and all the duties of it easy unto us, and to give us a facility in their

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[95] Ibid. 391-393.
[96] Ibid. 274-275.
[97] Owen addresses this point in particular in the "Preface to the Reader" of his work against the Socinian John Biddle, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12.48-52. He emphasises the need for not only right thinking about theology, but the right "power of the truth" also "abiding upon our hearts," 12.52.
[98] "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 good, that opposition to the law of God, which 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?" Ibid.

performance."[99] He shows that the new disposition is made up of more than individual actions; one act does not demonstrate the existence of a disposition.[100] Even habituated action does not prove the presence of a disposition. Owen is careful to show that this disposition does not consist merely in habits, as we today would use the term to refer to repeated patterns of action, even if it is acts of holiness that have become habitual.[101] Both Aristotle and Aquinas emphasise that consistency, facility, and pleasure are essential for the perfection of virtue, and Owen follows in this pattern as well. Gracious dispositions result in consistent and steady inclinations towards actions which are appropriate to those dispositions.[102]

A final way Owen emphasises the importance of the virtues for sanctification is his priority on the ordinary means of grace, that is, the preaching of God's word and participation in the sacraments, as that which is useful and necessary for the development of Christian character. Faith, hope, and love are strengthened in believers significantly through the sacraments and sitting under the influence of regular and scriptural preaching. While Owen's writings are generally written for Christians who are involved in fellowship with local congregations, in *Pneumatologia* Owen points to the singular responsibility believers have to make use of what he calls the "ordinances of worship" for the purpose of sanctification.[103] It is through these ordinances that God works upon the faculties of human nature and makes sanctification a desirable goal. Participation in ordinary church worship is a key aspect of the Spirit's sanctifying work in believers and it is one Owen warns against neglecting.[104] It is in

[99] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.498.
[100] Ibid. 473-474.
[101] Ibid. 474.
[102] Ibid. 482.
[103] Ibid. 389, 405, 441.
[104] He states that it is the duty of believers to "endeavour diligently, in the whole course of our lives, after these continual supplies of grace… If we are negligent in prayer, meditation, reading, hearing of the word, and other ordinances of divine worship, we have no ground to expect any great supplies to this end." Ibid. 554; also, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.59; *Of Temptation*, 6.147. Owen's continental contemporaries also make a similar emphasis on the importance of believers making use of the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments in the church. See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 18.12; 19.2; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 2.29-37, 55-58. Though the Reformed Orthodox may not make regular or continual reference to the necessity of regular church fellowship in their writings on sanctification, this does not mean that they do not prioritise such fellowship. They often assume that Christians reading their

the church, hearing the preaching of the word and participating in the administration of the Lord's Supper, that believers are continually confronted with both their sin and the grace and love of their Saviour. It is through the regular hearing of scripture as preached by a minister of the church that believers are strengthened in their understanding of scripture and their application of it to their lives. Sanctification is not an individualistic or isolated responsibility for the believer. Rather it must be seen, in Owen's theology, as inextricably bound up with the Christian's ordinary duty to make use of the regular means of grace.

Christian character requires divine initiation and continual help before it results in an improvement in naturally acquired capacities. If holiness and moral virtue can be produced as a result of acquired virtue, then they have their source in humanity, as do all natural dispositions.[105] Holiness, however, has neither a natural source nor a natural end. Owen points to the importance of sanctification in believers stemming from a new nature, something infused by God for divine purposes.[106] It is precisely because believers have been given a new nature that Owen emphasises that gospel holiness cannot be the same as moral virtue. A divinely infused nature which includes divinely infused dispositions which are continually being enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit through the virtues is the means by which believers are enabled to accomplish divine purposes.[107]

**Responding Progressively**

Despite his seeming hostility to the concept of virtue, it is Owen's goal not to abolish the it but rather to put it in its right place. He states that he intends "nothing in virtue and morality but to improve them, by fixing them on a proper foundation, or ingrafting them into

works would understand that church fellowship is essential to growth in sanctification and living towards God's ends for believers, and the idea of professing believers who are not communing with a local fellowship of other believers would be incomprehensible to them.

[105] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.51.1, Q.63.2.

[106] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.468-469.

[107] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, Q.62.1, Q.63.3; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.469.

that stock whereon alone they will thrive and grow, to the glory of God and the good of the souls of men."[108] The necessity of virtue being properly established in the Christian life so it can grow and flourish points to the progressive nature of sanctification in Owen's theology.[109] A disposition is infused into the believer at the beginning of regeneration to enable a continual process of renovation that will continue throughout the whole of the believer's life and be completed at the believer's glorification.

From the believer's perspective sanctification is not only a work that God does to him or her, but it is also something in which the believer also progressively participates. True, sanctification begins with a regenerated inclination and continues only through the Spirit's enabling. But Owen emphasises that the renewed disposition marks the beginning of the process of sanctification, a process in which the believer plays a significant role. This disposition does something for and in the believer. Once the Spirit renovates the disposition, then the believer is disposed towards God. This disposal results in a genuine inclination for holiness. Now there is a desire of the soul to be conformed to the image of Christ. In Owen's usage here, dispositions enable the progression of sanctifying acts in the life of the believer.[110] The believer is inclined to desire sanctification and disposed to begin taking the first steps towards communion with God. Both desire and action are products of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit's work does not result in either immediate or final transformation at the beginning of regeneration. Sanctification proceeds over the entirety of the believer's earthly life. There is a sense in which as soon as the believer is united with Christ, that believer has

[108] Ibid. 218.
[109] Turretin points to sanctification being accomplished in believers "by various degrees," *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 17.1.3, 10. À Brakel emphasises the continual warfare idea in progressive sanctification, in *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3.6-14.
[110] Owen uses the metaphor of gardening to describe the Spirit's sanctifying work and the believer's need for mortifying sin. Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.23.

been purified. Yet this work of purification, also called renovation or sanctification, is also something that continues throughout the believer's life.

> But it is not done at once; it is a progressive work, that hath many degrees. God did never sanctify any soul at once, unless by death. The body must die by reason of sin. Every believer is truly and really sanctified at once, but none is perfectly sanctified at once. It is not, therefore, necessary unto union that we should be completely sanctified, though it is that we should be truly sanctified.[111]

A believer is not sanctified completely at the moment of conversion. There is work to be done throughout the believer's life before death, but this work is accomplished progressively through the new disposition imparted by the Holy Spirit. The divinely given helps in prayer and understanding scripture strengthen the believer's ability to live by faith and hope in the Lord; the comfort and encouragement the Spirit provides motivation for the affections to cling to God rather than what Owen would call worldly delights; and spiritual gifts enable believers to act in ways that benefit other believers and bring glory to God, resulting in hope for those who are able to see the Spirit's work through them. [112] Through all of these ways the Spirit strengthens the believers' dispositions and gives them a strong inclination towards himself.

This point again references Aquinas' insistence that virtues, both infused and acquired, can be improved. Aquinas held that as acquired dispositions can be strengthened through repeated actions that fit with the disposition, so dispositions which result from the infusion of virtue are able to be strengthened through the improvement of their concentration.[113] One is able to grow in faith, though this does not mean that faith is an object or substance that can be changed in terms of mass or quantity. Yet once the theological virtues have been infused, they can be grown in strength and quality through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. So, Owen urges his readers to "endeavour after an improvement, an increase,

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[111] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.465.
[112] See the second half of Owen's second volume of *Pneumatologia* for treatments on these specific subjects. Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4.235-519.
[113] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 71-80.

a thriving in grace, that is, in holiness, is [sic] required of us."[114] Improving the infusion of virtue requires effort and constant attention. In fact, this is one of the believer's most significant responsibilities.[115] The believer must use "fervent prayer" and "continual self-abasement" to increase this disposition.[116] Believers are also called to "watch against sin" which threatens to dilute the disposition.[117]

In Owen's theology, the Holy Spirit incrementally enables sanctification by working directly on the dispositions of believers so that they may be moved in the whole triad of their natures towards the goal that God has called them. The Spirit's gracious work is what Owen describes as a constantly fed stream, a living spring and source of grace, beautiful, refreshing, and continually new.[118] Once believers are placed in this river with a God-directed current, the Spirit keeps the disposition active and strong.[119] God's people pursue true holiness in their thoughts, wills, and affections; this is something they are responsible for and are actually doing. But the Holy Spirit is within them fuelling their disposition for sanctification. The necessary impetus that keeps them in this process is provided through the Spirit's work. When they begin to stray, there is a magnetic pull bringing them back to the way they already, through the Spirit's work, desire to go. The Spirit's comforting and encouraging work provides motivation to keep thinking, feeling, and acting in a way that brings honour and glory to God.[120] As this process continues, through the renewed disposition, believers

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[114] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.387.

[115] "There is nothing more pressed on us, nothing more frequently proposed unto us, in the gospel, than the necessity of our purification, and the only way of effecting it," which is seeking after Jesus through faith." Ibid. 456.

[116] Ibid. 458, 459

[117] Ibid. 461.

[118] Ibid. 397.

[119] "It is sufficient unto our present purpose that in and by these promises we are made partakers of the divine nature, and are therein endowed with a constant, habitual disposition and inclination unto all acts and duties of holiness; for our power followeth our love and inclinations, as impotency is a consequent of their defect." Ibid. 622-623.

[120] Owen describes the pull this disposition exerts upon a believer's nature: "I cannot persuade myself that any believer can be so captivated at any time, under the power of temptations, corruptions, or prejudices, but that (if he will but take counsel with his own soul, upon the consideration of the command for obedience and holiness, and ask himself what he would have) he will have a plain and sincere answer, "That, indeed, I would do and have the good proposed, this holiness, this duty of obedience." Not only will conscience answer, that he must

learn to desire the work of sanctification more for themselves as well. Because of what God has given believers in the new disposition and a renewed nature, now they are fuelled in their desire for and acquisition of holiness. God starts the process, strengthens the process, and continues the process.

Owen uses this analogy of a stream to explain the Spirit's work in sanctification throughout his *Pneumatologia*.[121] The Spirit gives grace and infuses the disposition to keep the believer continually disposed in a God-ward direction. He likens this to a current in a stream that keeps a boat moving in the direction of the stream.[122] To expand Owen's analogy slightly, one could say that the infused disposition is the current that God gives to move believers in a sanctified direction. The Spirit keeps believers moving in this current that pushes them in the right direction. It is not that believers have no responsibility in this work; on the contrary, they have great responsibility as the scripture repeatedly calls them to be continually growing in sanctification. Believers are placed in this stream with a God-directed current. They are responsible for becoming entangled in weeds or branches on the bank, for being slowed or stopped in eddies of the stream, or for going the wrong direction despite the movement of the current. The Spirit's infused disposition does not guarantee that the entirety of the believer's progression in the way of holiness is exactly as it should be, nor that each particular step is what the Spirit desires for the believer. Believers experience both times of great growth and times of great struggle with inward sin.

Despite the faltering nature of human sanctification, it is precisely because there is divine power at work in each believer that Owen emphasises that Christians will become progressively more sanctified in this life. Virtue will more and more characterise their lives

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not do the evil whereunto temptation leadeth, for if he do, evil will ensue thereon; but the new nature, and his mind and spirit, will say, "This good I would do; I delight in it; it is best for me, most suited unto me." And so it joins all the strength and interest it hath in the soul with the command." Ibid. 623-624.

[121] Ibid. 397, 399, 403, 487.

[122] "As this stream passeth on in its course, it may meet with oppositions that may either stop it or divert it for a season; but its waters still press forward continually. Hereby doth the soul set God always before it, and walk continually as in his sight." Ibid. 486.

than vice. Gospel obedience will be more natural, and even at points, habitual. Though all believers should know that they will not attain perfection or glorification in this life, they are promised that the Spirit will work in them through the disposition he has given them to ensure that God's regenerating work of sanctification is completed in their lives. This hope strengthens believers in their own pursuit of this sanctification, and it continually increases the effectiveness of the disposition as well.

Owen's understanding of the progressive nature of sanctification begs the question why sanctification is not instantaneous. From a divine purpose side of the question, Owen answers that the continual nature of sanctification is given to show believers the kind of sinful desires lingering in them.[123] As they more and more see the conditions of their hearts, they will become more thankful for what God is doing in renovating them. The progressive nature of sanctification also results in believers learning the necessity of depending on God for the strength to become sanctified.[124] It is also a process that results in glory to the triune God.[125]

But one of the principle reasons sanctification is progressive is because of the nature of contrary dispositions that are present in believers' hearts. Natural humanity, as Owen refers to people without the Spirit's regenerating work, is in a continual state of spiritual degeneration.[126] Owen explains that infused dispositions are not the only dispositions that have purposes. Sin has its own particular purpose in believers. The "end and tendency" of sin is to "utterly deface the image of God in us."[127] There is a natural inclination of the mind to vanity, things that are "not a proper nor useful object unto the soul and its affections," which lead to "confusion" and "end in vanity or disappointment."[128] As the body continually

[123] Ibid. 471. See *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.93ff.
[124] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.568.
[125] Ibid. 504, 516.
[126] See Owen's chapter on "Corruption or Depravation of the Mind by Sin" in ibid. 242-282.
[127] Ibid. 646.
[128] Ibid. 251.

deteriorates throughout life, so the souls of unbelievers are in a continual state of spiritual corruption.[129] The Spirit's work at the new birth changes this spiritual decay and serves as a principle of life, but believers are still susceptible to decay. The old disposition still exerts an influence across the whole of the human nature. New birth imparts new life, but there are old tendencies resident in all humanity, regenerate and unregenerate alike, that battle against righteousness. This is why the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit and the infusion and empowering of dispositions are so important.

The work of renovation is necessary not only because of the ongoing work of recreation but also because of believers' continued susceptibility to sinful dispositions. Despite the Spirit's infusion of a gracious disposition, sanctification requires constantly guarding against the creeping influence of natural weakness and sinful desires.

> Watch diligently against those things which ye find by experience are apt to obstruct your fervency in duties. Such are indispositions through the flesh, or weariness of the flesh, distracting, foolish imaginations, the occasions of life revolving in our minds, and the like. If such impediments as these be not removed, if they be not watched against, they will influence the mind, and suffocate the exercise of faith therein.[130]

Owen warns against professing believers falling back into sin. This problem could be from a more passive sort of case which he describes as "indispositions, deadness, and coldness in duties," or it could become something much more ingrained.[131] Apathy poses a genuine danger for believers, and if not dealt with properly, it will turn into a much more difficult sort of problem to address. "Spiritual sloth is a habitual indisposition of mind unto spiritual duties in their proper time and season, arising from unbelief and carnal affections, producing a neglect of duties and dangers, remissness, carelessness, or formality in attendance unto them

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[129] "In the declaration of the state of corrupted nature after the fall, and before the reparation of it by the grace of Jesus Christ,—that is, the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit,—the Scripture principally insists on three things:—1. The corruption and depravation of the mind; which it calls by the name of darkness and blindness, with the consequents of vanity, ignorance, and folly. 2. The depravation of the will and affections; which it expresseth several ways, as by weakness or impotency, and stubbornness or obstinacy. 3. By the general name of death, extended to the condition of the whole soul. And these have various effects and consequences, as in our explanation of them will appear." Ibid. 244.
[130] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith,* 5.441.
[131] Owen, *Sermons,* 8.651.

or the performance of them."[132] This falling away poses the threat of developing a disposition that runs counter to the graciously infused disposition, undermining the impact the gracious disposition has upon a believer and inclining the person away from God and towards oneself. Though temptation to sin is a common part of the Christian life, Owen warns against allowing sinful affections to degenerate into a fully formed laziness. He writes of this spiritual sloth:

> It is in general an indisposition and unreadiness of mind, and so opposed unto the entire principle of our spiritual warfare. Fervency in spirit, alacrity of mind, preparation with the whole armour of God,—and therein girding up the loins of our minds, endeavouring to cast off every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us,—are required to be in us constantly, in the course of our obedience. But this sloth is that which gives us an indisposition of mind, in direct opposition unto them all. So it is described, Prov. 26:15. A person under the power of this vicious distemper of mind is indisposed to every duty, which makes them grievous unto him.[133]

In this warning Owen shows he has a very pastoral understanding of human weakness. Indolence and weakness are not the same thing, though they may sometimes look the same. It is important that they be carefully distinguished. There is a great difference between a habitual sort of spiritual sloth and the common struggles against sin that every believer faces.

> There is no man but may be occasionally indisposed unto spiritual duties. The most healthy and athletic constitution is subject unto the incursion of some distempers. Sometimes bodily infirmities may indispose us, sometimes present temptations may do so. Such was the indisposition which befell the disciples in the mount, Matt. 26:40, 41; which yet was not without their sin, for which they were reproved by our Saviour. But where these things are occasional, when those occasions are endeavoured to be prevented or removed, persons overtaken with them may not be said to be absolutely slothful. There may be many actual faults where there is not a habitual vice.[134]

Physical indisposition, struggles against sin, and even significant lapses in spiritual growth are not incompatible with the Spirit's work of renovation. Owen writes that believers are to expect their lives to include even severe battles against their own sinful tendencies.[135] Yet they are to take heart. As a part of regenerating them, not only is the spirit indwelling

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[132] Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 5.204.
[133] Ibid. 204-205.
[134] Ibid. 205.
[135] Owen describes believers' fight against indwelling sin in terms of warfare and battling habitual inclinations to sin in *The Nature and Power of Indwelling Sin,* 6.188-202.

believers, the Spirit is also involved in a continual work of renovation as well, and he will bring that work to completion.

As Owen explains in the final sections of his *Pneumatologia*, the Holy Spirit enables believers to live faithfully before God by working on their dispositions. The Spirit works faith in believers, enabling them to continually trust in Christ. The Spirit strengthens prayer and even prays on behalf of and through believers when they are unsure of how even to pray. The Spirit gives understanding to the mind so that God's people can understand his word. The Spirit provides conviction of sin, so that there can be continual reminders to pursue righteousness. The Spirit provides comfort and encouragement. As was discussed in the last chapter, the Spirit is continually renovating the souls and hearts of believers. The Spirit is the author and source of all spiritual gifts for believers. Every possible assistance that is necessary to strengthen the work of sanctification, the Holy Spirit provides for believers. Short of actually doing the work for Christians, the Spirit does everything to ensure that believers not only are able to be but are sanctified.[136]

Christian obedience, what he calls gospel holiness, is clearly a particularly important concept for Owen, and it forms a key part of how he works out the practical impact of the work of the Holy Spirit. But obedience is not merely a matter of right action. It is even more a matter of nature. Virtue encompasses much more than one's doings; it goes deeper to include thoughts, motivations, and desires as well. This is the goal of all theology for Owen,

[136] This is a difficult point to clarify, as it sounds like I am making Owen say two opposite things at the same time. The Holy Spirit does everything necessary for believers to be sanctified. This work is not done in place of believers working themselves, as though believers have nothing left to do themselves. That is true of Owen's teaching on justification, but considering sanctification Owen considers such a view to be antinomianism. Christians are called to be sanctified – to conform their hearts and lives to the way God calls Christians to be and live. Owen is clear that even this work on sanctification is ultimately God working through believers rather than them working themselves. From a divine perspective, God is doing everything to sanctify his people. Even the strength they require to do this work is provided from God. Start to finish, the whole process is something that God does. Yet from a human perspective, believers draw on the strength and power they have been given through the Spirit's work in the renovated and infused disposition to drawn near to God and continually become more and more sanctified.

that Christians are better empowered, in their entire person, to live for the glory of God.[137] What is the goal of the disposition given by the Holy Spirit? To allow the believer to live in Christian holiness. The new disposition is also how the Spirit unites believers with Christ. "This is that whereby we have union with Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Originally and efficiently the Holy Spirit dwelling in him and us is the cause of this union; but formally this new principle of grace is so."[138] It is the Holy Spirit's indwelling of believers that causes this union, but he does so also by producing in them gracious habits. Owen continues a short while later,

> Our likeness and conformity unto God consists herein; for it is the reparation of his image in us, Eph. 4:23, 24; Col. 3:10. Something, I hope, I apprehend concerning this image of God in believers, and of their likeness unto him, how great a privilege it is, what honour, safety, and security depend thereon, what duties are required of us on the account thereof; but perfectly to conceive or express the nature and glory of it we cannot attain unto, but should learn to adore the grace whence it doth proceed and is bestowed on us, to admire the love of Christ and the efficacy of his mediation, whereby it is renewed in us;—but the thing itself is ineffable.[139]

As the Spirit gives believers the new disposition, they are enabled to obey God's commands and live before him in true righteousness and holiness. God infuses virtue into the believer, and then the believer is given strength and ability, through the new disposition, to live a life that is characterised by gospel holiness. Evangelical holiness, the true development of right virtue that is acceptable to God, is thus a fruit of the Christian's union with Christ, and Owen sees it as a source of great beauty in the Christian life.

The process of renovation is one of the most significant and regular aspects to the ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in believers. Though this work is principally the result of the Holy Spirit's actions upon a believer, it is something that involves all three persons of the Godhead. The Father's kindness is demonstrated through the Son's sacrificial offering and

[137] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.530. Owen also gives this same goal at the close of both early catechisms he wrote for his first pastoral charge in Fordham.
[138] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.478.
[139] Ibid. 478.

the Spirit's application of this work to believers.[140] It is the ongoing work of recreating and reforming the new creature by the grace of God. Owen describes the importance of this doctrine:

> It is the work of regeneration, with respect both to its foundation and progress, that is here described. 1. The foundation of the whole is laid in our being "renewed in the spirit of our mind;" which the same apostle elsewhere calls being "transformed in the renovation of our minds," Rom. 12:2. That this consists in the participation of a new, saving, supernatural light, to enable the mind unto spiritual actings, and to guide it therein, shall be afterward declared. Herein consists our "renovation in knowledge, after the image of him who created us," Col. 3:10. And, 2. The principle itself infused into us, created in us, is called the "new man," Eph. 4:24,—that is, the new creature before mentioned; and it is called the "new man," because it consists in the universal change of the whole soul, as it is the principle of all spiritual and moral action.[141]

Owen specifically points to the change that results in the mind, but his comment on "universal change of the whole soul" points to his view that renovation is something that impacts the whole triad of human faculties.[142] All of a believer's essence is progressively changed because of the Spirit's work of regeneration and through the Spirit's ongoing work of renovation. This change comes because of the graciously infused disposition that enables believers to be inclined to live for God rather than for themselves. The work of renovation is in Owen's theology a progressive work upon the whole person.

This progressive work of sanctification will be completed only at glorification when believers are fully and finally brought into communion with the triune God.[143] There will come a day when the believer's fight against sin and process of renovation are completed. The progression of sanctification will have accomplished its work in the believer's life, and the perfection of the believer will be eternal. Owen uses this divine end of the process of

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[140] "And the immediate efficient cause in the communication of the love and kindness of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, unto us, is the Holy Spirit. And this he doth in the renovation of our natures, by the washing of regeneration, wherein we are purged from our sins, and sanctified unto God." Ibid. 209. This point demonstrates Owen's insistence on doing fully Trinitarian theology.

[141] Ibid. 221-222.

[142] See Kapic, *Communion with God*, 46; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 3.7-9. Kapic also notes that the Spirit's work of sanctification is substantially connected with the image of God in humanity. See *Communion with God*, 35-66.

[143] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.582-583. He uses the analogy of the man whose sight Jesus healed in stages rather than all at once. See Owen's *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, 1.383.

sanctification to urge believes on in their own responsibilities to be sanctified. Here again Owen's relation of Pneumatology and Christology becomes a matter of significant comfort for the believer, for the same "Holy Spirit that glorified the human nature [of Christ]" will also produce the same results in the bodies of believers when they see God.[144] The final result of sanctification in believers provides strength for their pursuit of communion with God through holiness today.

Renovation and sanctification are inherently linked in Owen's theology. Both are a result of the Spirit's regenerating work. Sanctification is only possible in someone who has been reborn and recreated. Renovation can only take place in someone who is spiritually alive. Prior to rebirth renovation is impossible; what is needed is spiritual life. But once the Holy Spirit has created life through the work of regeneration, then the process of rebuilding the human nature begins. Because of the work of regeneration and through the work of renovation believers are changed in their natures. Through the infusion of a new disposition, the new creature is enabled to progressively fight against the old creature. That which has been renewed seeks to fight against and conquer that in human nature which was corrupted. Owen points out that though the initial act of recreation is immediate, it results in the ongoing change in the believer's life and character.[145] The supernaturally infused disposition is similar to natural habits in that repeated action ingrains the patterns.[146] The process of renovation continually strengthens the believer in new ways of life, ways that derive their strength from the divinely infused theological virtues.

## Conclusion

A gracious disposition, then, is a tendency that God infuses into believers and uses to bend them towards his grace. God graciously uses this new disposition to conform believers

[144] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.183. See Kapic, *Communion with God*, 84-88.
[145] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3.222-223.
[146] Ibid. 389.

to his will. “The habit or principle which we have described is nothing but a transcript of the law of God implanted and abiding in our hearts, whereby we comply with and answer unto the whole will of God therein.”[147] Not only are believers enabled to follow God’s will through compliance with his law, but they also desire to do so. The new disposition works a new impression on their hearts and continually inclines them towards God.

> This new heart is a heart with the law of God written in it, as before mentioned; and this new spirit is the habitual inclination of that heart unto the life of God, or all duties of obedience. And herein the whole of what we have asserted is confirmed,—namely, that antecedently unto all duties and acts of holiness whatever, and as the next cause of them, there is by the Holy Ghost a new spiritual principle or habit of grace communicated unto us and abiding in us, from whence we are made and denominated holy.[148]

Sanctification in believers thus flows entirely from God’s work in them. It stands before anything they do, and it empowers all that can be said to make them holy. Rather than merely giving them a specific list of rules to follow and sins to avoid, through sanctification the Holy Spirit impresses on believers’ minds, wills, and affections the need for every aspect of their lives to be purposed for the end for which God created them: his glory through their communion with him. Where previously believers were enslaved to their passions and desires for sin, now they think, choose, and feel according to this great end and purpose.

Disposition is a key part of Owen’s development of his doctrine of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. This has been shown in several ways. First, The Holy Spirit gives a new disposition in believers to enable virtue and to fuel sanctification. In Owen’s elaboration of this topic, virtue is specific and necessary power to live rightly before God, and the infusion of a gracious disposition is how this happens. This disposition is a product of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross, and because it is empowered by the Holy Spirit, it will result in the change to which God calls the believer. Second, as this gracious disposition is a gift of God, it is something that relies on a work of

[147] Ibid. 476.
[148] Ibid. 477.

God from beginning to end. The whole of the process of sanctification is something that leans wholly on God for strength and enablement. Though believers participate in the process of sanctification, they do not depend any less on God for his help throughout their battles against sin. And third, this disposition results in a progressive change in the whole person. All a believer's faculties of mind, will, and affections are regularly and progressively producing sanctified acts. The disposition impacts every part of a who a person is. There is no compartmentalisation of the effects of the disposition in the believer. God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, calls the whole person to be made holy. The new disposition, fuelled by the power of the Spirit and the ordinary means of grace, is how this change is produced in the entirety of the human nature.

Virtue – evangelical obedience or Christian holiness – is a significant emphasis of Owen's development of the doctrine of sanctification in his treatment on the work of the Holy Spirit. The infusion of a new disposition is how God enables this work in believers and it shows how God graciously provides even the strength required for obedience to his commands. In Owen's development, disposition is a key part of God's gracious work in the lives of believers for the ongoing purposes of sanctification.

## Chapter 6 – The Pastoral Disposition in Owen: What it is

Having seen the importance of *habitus* or "disposition" for practical theology, having explored the scholastic foundation for this concept of "disposition," and having examined how Owen develops the framework of the dispositional idea in his *Pneumatologia*, we are now in a place to rightly understand how he uses it to explain the pastoral disposition. Remember, his theology of dispositions depends on the concepts of regeneration and sanctification and, through them, the Spirit's work upon the whole human soul. Early in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* Owen writes of one who desires the pastoral office, "there are certain qualifications previously required in him, disposing and making him fit for that office."[1] Here we see Owen clearly pointing out the prerequisite of the pastoral disposition for those who would engage in pastoral ministry. When he writes of that-which-makes-a-pastor-fit-for ministry or how-the-pastor-is-disposed-to-pastoral-ministry he is applying the concept of disposition to pastoral work. What then is this pastoral disposition that is required for biblical pastoral ministry in Owen's theology, and how did Owen himself apply these ideas through his own preaching and writing? These are the questions this chapter will seek to answer.

The concept of disposition is a key element of Owen's mature theology of pastoral practice. As such, the pastoral disposition, in Owen's thought, necessarily involves inclinations of the mind, will, and affections rather than being merely a matter of responsibilities or skills or even gifts. It is also a product of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work in believers. Because of the connection of disposition to Owen's broader theological project, pastoral practice should be considered a matter of sanctification and should be practised with certain ends in view. These are the themes in Owen's pastoral theology that

[1] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.49.

the rest of this project will explore. First, however, it would be helpful to set the scene of Owen's final pastoral charge.

Owen began his pastoral ministry in the rural Essex village of Fordham. Not long after having taken that position, he was offered another much larger church in Coggeshall, not far from the thriving merchant town of Colchester. It was in this church that Owen aligned himself with the congregational understanding of church government rather than the Presbyterian understanding. While church attendance was, at least in some sense, mandatory during this time, the congregation seemed to be successful and to appreciate Owen's ministry.[2] He proved himself to be a popular speaker at ministers' gathering, and he was a noted figure involved in the varied inter-church relationships of Essex ministers and churches.[3] According to one early biographer, it was in this congregation at Coggeshall that Owen had hoped spend the majority of his life's work.[4] But Owen's plans were changed when he was ordered to accompany Oliver Cromwell's army to expeditions in both Ireland and in Scotland. When these tours these were finished, both Owen and his congregation learned through a local newspaper that he was being sent to Oxford.[5] He soon established himself as an able administrator and was shortly thereafter promoted to the position of vice-chancellor of the university.

Owen's writing during this period, however, was not all for official parliamentary or university business. His several treatises about sanctification and progression in personal holiness were produced specifically for the university students under his charge. Also little noted among modern biographers and students of Owen is that he gathered a small congregation in his native town of Stadham, not far from Oxford, on the Sundays when he

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[2] See Gribben, *John Owen*, 70.
[3] T. W. Davids, *Annals of Evangelical Nonconformity in the County of Essex*, (London: Jackson, Walford & Hodder, 1863), 224; Gribben, *John Owen*, 72, 79-83. Owen was later remembered as one of the "good ministers" and "men of eminence" that had been involved in pastoral ministry in Essex. Davids, *Annals of Evangelical Nonconformity*, 458.
[4] Asty, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Owen,* x.
[5] Ibid.

was not engaged in preaching arrangements in Oxford.[6] It was in this town that Owen's father had been a "painful minister in the vineyard of the Lord," and it appears that Owen was keeping up connections that would stay with him for the rest of his life.[7] But it is important to note the significance of Owen's involvement in pastoral ministry in addition to his academic work. Even amidst the busyness of his academic and governmental responsibilities, Owen found time to be involved in the care of souls. He used both his academic and his personal situations to provide pastoral oversight to those under his care.

By the end of the 1650s, Cromwell was dead, Owen had been relieved of his Oxford responsibilities, and the wind was swiftly moving in the direction of the establishment Anglicans. The commonwealth government collapsed and Charles II was restored to the throne. The notorious Act of Uniformity which resulted in the ejection of some 2000 nonconformist ministers from their congregations came not long after, and nonconformity became both unfashionable and illegal. In the space of a few years, Owen went from the top of society to only just avoiding the status of an outlaw. He continued to live at his estate in Stadham as long as it was safe to do so, but his church services were observed, spies and informants kept close tabs on his every move, and he found himself in constant danger of arrest. Owen was forced to relocate to the busy city of London in an attempt to escape detection. For much of the 1660s, Owen's movements are hard to trace with precision, but by the end of the decade and after several moves, Owen had again established himself as a pastor of a small congregation of formerly very powerful members of Cromwell's circle.[8] By

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[6] Andrew Thompson, *Life of Dr. Owen,* in Owen's *Works,* 1.lxxvii. See also Asty, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Owen,* xii; Anonymous, *The Life of the Reverend and Learned Dr. John Owen,* xxiv; Davids, *Annals of Evangelical Nonconformity,* 563-564. Gribben puts Owen's involvement in this congregation after his time at Oxford was finished in *John Owen,* 29, 181, 212, 215. Peter Toon references the possibility of Owen being part of a church in Stadham but seems unaware of the earlier biographical information of Owen's activities during this time. See *God's Statesman,* 57-58.

[7] Owen's second wife, Dorothy D'Oyley, was from a village close to this town. See the anonymous *Life of the Reverend and Learned Dr. John Owen,* xxxiv; Thompson, *Life of Dr. Owen,* in Owen's *Works,* 1.xxii, xcv; Toon, *God's Statesman,* 2.

[8] Thompson, *Life of Dr. Owen,* in Owen's *Works,* 1.xc-xci; Gribben, *John Owen*, 227-228, 248-249. Even following the Restoration and the Act of Uniformity, Owen was still remarkably well connected. See Gary S.

the early years of the 1670s, Owen's small congregation had merged with the much larger congregation of Owen's old friend, Joseph Caryl. Owen was, for the first time in his life, at the helm of a significant and mature congregation. His theology of congregationalism now well-formed and his place among nonconformist divines well known, Owen was finally in a unique place to make a significant impact on the world of independent churches.

Not that Owen thought this himself. He saw his world as having all but collapsed with the restoration of the monarchy and the ejection of nonconformists from the state church. The sermons from this latter portion of his life make grim reading, filled with scathing denunciations of English society and depressing comments on how "England cannot be saved."[9] He felt that even the gathered churches, the faithful few, were filled with far too much worldliness to be able to avert the impending judgment that for twenty years Owen had been expecting. His sermons read as if delivered by a man broken by his times, and his times were indeed difficult, especially for dissenting ministers.[10] Yet, illustrating the complicated nature of the times, Owen's church and even Owen himself were significantly involved in an effort of dissenting congregations to raise nearly £40,000 for Charles II following the difficult first decade of Charles' reign.[11]

The interconnectedness of Owen's circle gave him ample opportunity for fellowship and interaction with similarly minded pastors and congregations, as he was geographically situated in one of London's wards most densely populated with nonconformist ministers and churches.[12] Though the establishment Anglicans had hoped that the Act of Uniformity would

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De Krey, *London and the Restoration, 1659-1683,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227-228, 235.

[9] Dr Williams's Library (DWL), MSS L6/3, 29.

[10] Owen was among a number of ministers who were together fined nearly £5000, a fantastic sum for the time, for having contravened Parliament's draconian measures to suppress nonconformist preaching. See Richard Greaves, "The Rye House Plotting, Nonconformist Clergy, and Calvin's Resistance Theory," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives,* ed by W. Fred Graham, (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 511.

[11] De Krey, *London and the Restoration,* 125-127. This event also points to the prestige Owen and his congregation held in the circle of nonconformist churches following the Restoration.

[12] Ibid. 280.

stifle dissenting churches, they actually strengthened the resolve of the independents. Despite the strict measures Parliament enacted to force ministers to comply, congregations were still in need of pastors.[13] Owen was uniquely placed to have an impact both to the members of these numerous dissenting churches, and to their often-struggling pastors.[14] His mature theology of the church was written after he had been established as the minister of this congregational church in Leadenhall Street. And it is in these mature works that we see the emphasis on the pastoral disposition most clearly.

**The Pastoral Disposition Defined**

It is in Owen's final work for pastors and churches that his explanation of the pastoral disposition shines through most clearly. He writes of a particular disposition required for pastors that disposes them and suits them for pastoral ministry, describing those who have what disposes them as being "meet," "fit," or "suited" for the pastorate.[15] This disposition, building upon how Owen develops this concept in *Pneumatologia*, is a whole-person inclination, is infused by God into the believer, and is what enables a person to develop distinctly Christian character throughout the whole of one's faculties.[16] A right disposition for the pastor involves the mind, will, and affections all being inclined both towards God and towards the congregation.

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[13] "No single event of the early Restoration was more unsettling for London citizens than the expulsion of sixty-four Reformed Protestant clergy from the pulpits of London, Westminster, and Middlesex on 24 August 1662. The diocese of London was the most heavily purged in the country. Intended to strengthen the national church by reserving its ministry for those who accepted the prayer book and Episcopal authority, the act instead severely weakened public ministry in the city. Not until the eighteenth century did the Anglican order recover the stature and visibility it lost in London by re-establishing itself upon the ruin of dozens of respected leaders." Ibid. 87.

[14] "Many of the displaced London clergy had acquired national reputations through their writing and preaching…. After its own years in the wilderness, the Anglican order could initially fill few city pulpits with clergy of the equivalent stature. As a result, many of the city's most articulate Protestant lay people continued to identify with their former pastors, often in full or partial dissent from the church settlement, but sometimes in outward conformity." Ibid.

[15] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49, 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 65, 67, 73, 87, 89.

[16] Paul Ballard and John Pritchard connect practical theology to precisely this emphasis in their statement that "the overall purpose of a model of practical theology, therefore, is to facilitate habitus, a disposition of mind and heart charaterized by informed Christian wisdom." in *Practical Theology in Action*, 178.

This disposition contains five key components in Owen's development: "furniture with spiritual gifts and abilities by the communication of the Holy Ghost unto him in an unmeasurable fullness, whereby he was fitted for the discharge of his office;" an attitude of "compassion and love to the flock;" a spirit of "continual watchfulness over the whole flock, to keep it, to preserve it, to feed, to lead, and cherish it, to purify and cleanse it, until it be presented unspotted unto God" a mindset of "Zeal for the glory of God, in his whole ministry and in all the ends of it;" and "some degree of eminency" in character which sets the pastor apart as a moral example to the congregation.[17] In this definition we see the disposition itself, the impact on the affections, mind, and will, and also the result of virtue in the minister's pastoral practice. But not only are these the characteristics of pastors which demonstrate the presence of the pastoral disposition, they are also the "qualifications of Christ unto, and the gracious qualities of his mind and soul in, the discharge of his pastoral office."[18] In other words, Owen points pastors to the disposition Christ had towards his people, as demonstrated in his earthly ministry, as an example of the way they are to think, choose, and feel about their congregations.

We see something of this idea in the writings of nineteenth century Lutheran pastor C. F. W. Walther. He offers one of the most recent and theologically embedded explanations of the pastoral disposition, summarising the concept this way:

> Pastoral theology is the God-given, practical disposition of the soul, acquired by certain means, by which a minister is equipped to perform all the tasks that come to him in that capacity validly, in a legitimate manner, to the glory of God, and for the advancement of his own and his hearers' salvation.[19]

Walther's definition explains the concept more succinctly than does Owen, yet both writers point to the key supporting ideas in the pastoral disposition: a divine source, impacting the

[17] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49-51.
[18] Ibid. 49.
[19] C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 7.

whole soul of the minister, given for an immediate purpose, used in the church, and designed for certain ends.

The concept of the pastoral disposition shows that pastoral ministry is much more a matter of being or character than skills. "Remember," writes Harold Senkbeil in his pastoral theology, "I contend that being comes before doing in pastoral work."[20] The work of a pastor depends more on who one is rather than merely on what one does. Owen writes of something deeper than either skills or knowledge, and it is this being that results in giftedness in doing. He points out that though pastors who are lacking some of the specific gifts required for pastoral ministry aren't necessarily disqualified from pastoral ministry on that basis, no one should be accepted to the pastorate without some demonstration of this disposition.[21] As Gregory the Great wrote in one of the earliest developed works of pastoral theology, "No one presumes to teach an art that he has not first mastered through study. How foolish it is therefore for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority when the care of souls is the art of arts."[22] This internal disposition is central to a minister's suitability for ministry.[23] Owen writes of the necessity of nothing less than a whole-person inclination towards what God wants the pastor to both be and do. Owen emphasises that God provides pastors for Christ's church and God gives those pastors the ability to accomplish pastoral responsibilities within the church.[24] The pastoral disposition demonstrates not only what pastors can do in their congregations, but even more importantly, who they will be for their congregations.

Now it is important to maintain a distinction that Owen himself sometimes confuses, that is between a disposition and a gift. In *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* he clearly refers to a disposition in the soul of the pastor, a disposition towards the flock and fuelled by

[20] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls,* 117.
[21] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49-50.
[22] St Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule,* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 29.
[23] Walther also points to this idea of the pastoral disposition necessarily entailing some measure of suitability or "proficiency," stating, "This should suggest right at the beginning the concept of that 'skill' and 'fitness' which the apostle requires of a minister," in *Pastoral Theology,* 7-8.
[24] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.74-75.

the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere, and often in the same work as well, Owen refers to gifts and abilities. The problem is these terms are not synonymous in Owen's theology, though he sometimes uses them that way. Following scholastic ontology, gifts and dispositions are distinct but interrelated categories.[25] This is certainly true in Owen's pastoral theology, as he uses gifts as but one subset of the broader idea of the pastoral disposition.[26] In the last section of *Pneumatologia* Owen elaborates the gifts given to pastors for the work of the ministry, locating them exclusively in the power of the mind, stating that "the will, and the affections, and the conscience are unconcerned in them," whereas the pastoral disposition is resident in all the powers of the soul.[27] There is clearly a distinction between the categories of gifts and dispositions, except it is distinction Owen does not make very consistently himself throughout *The True Nature of a Gospel Church.* Being aware of this peculiarity is key to understanding what Owen is doing in his mature theology of pastoral ministry. Sometimes Owen uses "gifts" or "gifts and abilities" to refer to the specific spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to pastors, and sometimes he uses these terms as a synecdoche for the pastoral disposition. Context should make the issue clear, but where it does not, remembering this distinction will be helpful.

Perhaps the one key word that could sum up the whole of Owen's understanding of the pastoral disposition is the term shepherd.[28] What is the core of pastoral ministry? For Owen, the centre of the pastor's responsibility is the right care of the flock of God. The pastoral disposition is to be displayed through

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[25] For more on the way Aquinas distinguishes between and relates dispositions (habits), virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits see *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, QQ.49-70; Pinsent, "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 475-488.

[26] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.48-51.

[27] Owen, *A Discourse on Spiritual Gifts*, 4.436-437. He enumerates three gifts given for this purpose, "wisdom," "skill to divide the word aright," and "utterance." Ibid. 508-513.

[28] While Owen has a slight preference for the term "minister" when he refers to the leader(s) of the church generally, he makes a significant emphasis of the term "pastor" in chapters 4-7 of *The True Nature of a Gospel Church.* He regularly uses the terms "pastor" and "minister" interchangeably. For an extended biblical theology of the concept of shepherding and its relationship to pastoral care see Laniak, *Shepherds after My own Heart,* passim.

> An imitation of Christ, as the great shepherd of the flock, in meekness, in care, in love, in tenderness towards the whole flock. So Christ is described, Isa xl. 11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Here is the great pattern, here is an example for all who are shepherds of the flock under Christ (who intend to give an account with comfort unto the great shepherd of the sheep, when he shall appear at the last day), — in meekness and condescension giving out help and assistance, bearing with all things, that cannot particularly be insisted upon; and especially conforming unto him who knows how to have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.[29]

Pastors take their job description from Christ as the chief shepherd. So, as Owen explains, pastors both respond to Christ's example of caring for the church and represent Christ to the flock. He points out the kindness and tenderness pastors are to have for their congregations. Pastors are to see Christ's care for his flock as their example and pattern, and this pattern informs their responses to their congregations from the whole of their being.

The work of shepherding also contains a ruling or governing aspect as well. Owen continues, "It is our great work, in what interest Christ hath given us in the rule of the church, to represent him as spiritual, as holy, as meek, – as universally tending to edification, and not to destruction."[30] This rule, in Owen's theology, is spiritual rather than physical, caring for the souls of those in their congregations rather than controlling their lives. They do this by representing Christ "in the imitable part of his sacerdotal office; which is, to make continual prayers and intercession for the church, – and that church, in particular, whereunto we belong."[31] The sacerdotal office of Christ was an important theme for Owen. In fact, it was one of his life's passions. Christ's priestly work on behalf of his people is one of the first

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[29] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.437.

[30] Ibid. This sort of emphasis was far from universal among the pastors of Owen's day. "Contemporaries and modern commentators alike have had few good words to say about the quality of pastoral care provided by clergy in the eighteenth century. Clergymen were at best thought to be more devoted to hunting than to their spiritual duties, and at worst were regarded as covetous and lazy. Bishop Gilbert Burnet made himself few friends within the Church by publishing his view that the general neglect of pastoral care was one reason for the contempt in which the clergy were held. 'It is not easy to bring the clergy to desire to take pains among their people,' he complained; 'they seem to have no great sense of devotion, and none at all of the pastoral care.' The importance which Burnet placed upon pastoral care can be seen in his statement that his *Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, published in 1692, was the he had written that pleased him the most." Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parson and Parishioners, 1660-1740,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 108.

[31] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.437.

themes upon which Owen wrote, and he took a significant portion of the second volume of his commentary on Hebrews to elaborate the significance of Christ's sacerdotal office.[32]

That Owen ties pastoral responsibilities to Christ's priestly office shows the importance with which Owen holds the pastoral office.[33] Pastors do not merely fulfil their own responsibilities and go about their own priorities in their own churches. They are a living testimony to who Jesus is to his people and represent a significant aspect of Christ's work on behalf of his people.[34] As Christ makes prayers and intercessions for his people, so pastors are to intercede for their flocks in prayer.[35] What sort of attitude should pastors have for their congregations? The same attitude Christ has for his flock when he prays for them before the throne of his father. Owen understood the weight of what he was teaching. "It is a great work thus, in all these things, to represent Christ in all his offices unto the church; and indeed, who is sufficient for these things?"[36] What is the central message Owen has for young pastors in their roles? Be a shepherd for the flock entrusted to your care.

The terminology of shepherds and sheep underscores the mutual love and care that should exist among pastors for their congregations.

> The name of a pastor or shepherd is metaphorical. It is a denomination suited unto his work, denoting the same office and person with a bishop or elder, spoken of absolutely, without limitation unto either teaching or ruling; and it seems to be used or applied unto this office because it is more comprehensive of and instructive in all the duties that belong unto it than any other name whatever, nay, than all of them put together. The grounds and reasons of this metaphor, or whence the church is called a

[32] Gribben, *John Owen,* 235-236. See also Owen, *Concerning the Sacerdotal Office of Christ*, in *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (volume 2). Henry M. Knapp points out how Owen's Hebrews commentary was a key example of his practical application of the education he had received at Oxford in the theological method of reformed scholasticism as well as an ongoing interaction with key proponents of that method. See "Exegetical Method in the 17th Century," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism*, ed by Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma & Jason Zuidema, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 540-541.

[33] This notwithstanding, Owen still rejected the use of the term "priest" as a particular designation for pastors, and he argued that all Christians had a right to the term. See Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished,* 13.19-28.

[34] Owen, *Sermons,* 9.437.

[35] "Without this, no man can or doth preach to them as he ought, nor perform any other duty of his pastoral office. From hence may any man take the best measure of the discharge of his duty towards his flock. He that doth constantly, diligently, fervently, pray for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity in the discharge of all other pastoral duties, nor can he voluntarily omit or neglect any of them." Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.77.

[36] Owen, *Sermons,* 9.437.

> flock, and whence God termeth himself the shepherd of the flock; whence the sheep of this flock are committed unto Christ, whereon he becomes "the good shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep," and the prince of shepherds; what is the interest of men in a participation of this office, and what their duty thereon,—are things well worth the consideration of them who are called unto it. "Hirelings," yea, "wolves" and "dumb dogs," do in many places take on themselves to be shepherds of the flock, by whom it is devoured and destroyed.[37]

The metaphor of shepherding is a critical piece of the canonical understanding of how a congregation receives care. The emphasis is on care rather than solely on rule or oversight. Shepherding involves provision and protection. It assumes a relationship between shepherd and flock. Owen notes the importance of dedication to this responsibility of care, "He is no pastor who doth not feed his flock. It belongs essentially to the office; and that not now and then (according to the figure and image that is set up of the ministry in the world, – a dead idol) as occasion serves."[38] The pastor is to "labour with diligence and intention, with weariness and industry."[39] He complains of pastors who "have been so addicted to their study, that they have thought the last day of the week sufficient to prepare for their ministry, though they employ all the rest of the week in other studies. But your great business is, to trade with your spiritual abilities."[40] Owen believed that the essence of pastoral ministry was feeding the flock of God, and that principally through the regular preaching of God's word and the administration of the sacraments. Because of the seriousness of this task, it should not be taken up lightly, for it cannot simply be set aside at will.[41]

Thus, the pastoral disposition is chiefly exemplified in the metaphor of shepherding.[42] In this, Owen describes the character of the biblically qualified and gifted minister as a constant responsibility. He writes on the "constant exercise of gifts" because the pastoral ministry requires continual energy directed at the pastoral responsibilities.

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[37] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.47-48.
[38] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.453.
[39] Ibid. 454.
[40] Ibid. 448.
[41] Ibid. 461.
[42] "The authority of a minister relates to his flock; and he who hath no flock hath no authority of a minister: if he have not a ministerial authority, in reference to a flock, a people, a church, he hath none, he can have none in himself." Owen, *Of the Divine Original of the Scriptures*, 16.308.

> There is and was in this great Shepherd a continual watchfulness over the whole flock, to keep it, to preserve it, to feed, to lead, and cherish it, to purify and cleanse it, until it be presented unspotted unto God… I speak not distinctly of previous qualifications unto an outward call only, but with a mixture of those qualities and duties which are required in the discharge of this office; and herein also is the Lord Christ to be our example. And hereunto do belong, — [1.] Constant prayer for the flock; [2.] Diligence in the dispensation of the word with wisdom, as unto times, seasons, the state of the flock in general, their light, knowledge, ways, walking, ignorance, temptations, trials, defections, weaknesses of all sorts, growth, and decays, etc.; [3.] Personal admonition, exhortation, consolation, instruction, as their particular cases do require; [4.] All with a design to keep them from evil, and to present them without blame before Christ Jesus at the great day.[43]

The shepherd of physical sheep is not able to simply clock out at the end of the day; there are continual and ongoing responsibilities, day and night. So, Owen emphasises of shepherding the spiritual flock that is the church. The pastoral heart must be a central aspect of ministers' character so they have the incentive to drive onward to keep pursuing the lost sheep, nurturing the wayward sheep, and resolving the numerous other frustrations that pastoral ministry so often entails.[44] The gifted and qualified minister is one who constantly works for "the knowledge and consideration of the state of our flocks."[45] But this focus is not merely an outward focus, it is an attitude that flows out of the minister's own inclination. Ministers, in Owen's theology, are to be inclined towards their congregations. They are to be rightly disposed *for* the work, but they are also to be disposed *towards* their flock. There is to be a love in the minister's heart for the people of God. The affection and compassion pastors show their churches comes out of a God-given disposition for those whom God has entrusted to their care. Doing the work of the ministry in a merely proficient manner can never fulfil the scriptural requirements for one who shepherds God's flock. Rather there must be an inward disposition of being towards the care of souls that produces the right mindset and leads to right action in the church. Being comes before doing in Owen's understanding of pastoral care, and it is this dispositional being that instils the shepherd's heart for the sheep.

[43] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.50.
[44] For a particularly bad example of how things could go awry between a minister and a congregation, see Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, 119-122.
[45] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.456.

**An Infused Disposition**

Owen's primary elaboration of disposition in *Pneumatologia* emphasises that the Holy Spirit infuses dispositions into believers. So, in his pastoral writings he also points to the pastoral disposition as a divinely infused gift given to pastors that enables them to carry out the responsibilities of the office of pastor. Owen places the beginning of this disposition in the enabling that comes from God. He writes about the pastoral ministry that, "every one for such an undertaking must have a warrant by an immediate call from God."[46] This "call" is demonstrated through divinely infused ability and gifting. God is the one who calls ministers to their flocks, and this call is revealed through a suitability for ministry that comes from divine source. The Holy Spirit is the essential supply of a minister's right disposition towards both pastoral responsibilities and towards the congregation. As believers need divine help to fulfil divine obligations in their daily lives, so pastors require divine assistance for their daily responsibilities in service to the church. The disposition is given to enable pastoral action, but this ability is only given through the ongoing dependence on the Spirit's work. It is important to understand that pastors can "never develop a pastoral *habitus* just by practice. This genuinely pastoral character and grace is something you grow into not merely by long habituation, but through your own connection with the Lord Jesus by his word through meditation and prayer."[47] The infused nature of the pastoral disposition means that pastors need to depend on God's grace for the right use of their ministerial gifts. Owen writes, "God having bestowed the gift and requiring the duty, his people ought not to be hindered in the performance of it."[48] The pastoral disposition flows not from any inherent ability on the part of the pastor but from divinely provided means necessary for the accomplishment of pastoral responsibilities.

[46] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.28-29.
[47] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 124.
[48] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.46.

Owen's use of the concept of pastoral dispositions shows the necessity of demonstrably Christian church officers. He makes this explicit by stating a pastor must be "one that hath in some good measure evidenced his faith, love, and obedience unto Jesus Christ in the church."[49] Walther also links the importance of the Spirit's prior work of grace in a person with the pastoral disposition, stating "justifying faith," is "a prerequisite; and only the one who stands in grace, who is born again, can have it."[50] The idea of the pastoral disposition necessitates that the one who has this disposition is someone in whom the Spirit is working the power of regeneration. Determining, as far as is outwardly possible, the genuineness of the Christian faith in a potential minister is a key responsibility of churches.[51] Owen argues that not only is having unregenerate pastors leading the church unwise, it is also presumptuous. "Nothing can be more wicked or foolish than for a man to intrude himself into a trust which is not committed unto him. They are branded as profligately wicked who attempt any such thing among men, which cannot be done without falsification."[52] One who has not personally experienced the reality and power of the Spirit's regenerating work will hardly be able to explain and encourage the importance of that work in others. Denominational groups who show such little concern in validating the faith of those they install as ministers results, in Owen's estimation, in putting Christ's sheep under the care of wolves. For Owen, to serve as a pastor of a church is a distinctly Christian responsibility.

The pastoral disposition, then, is an interior characteristic of a regenerate minister that demonstrates the faithfulness and fruitfulness of Christian theology in that minister's own life

[49] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.55.
[50] Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 9.
[51] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.54-55. See the chapter "Concerning the Life of the Pastor" in Gregory the Great's *Book of Pastoral Rule*, 49-85, with a special focus on section 1 of the chapter.
[52] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.53. Gregory the Great uses the prophetic example from Ezekiel of those who not only kept the sheep from profiting from clear and refreshing water but also spoiled it for those who came after. He warns against shepherds who similarly hinder God's flock from the nourishment of God's word, even pointing to Jesus' words in the gospels about those who lead astray God's little ones having a worse judgment than being thrown into the sea with a millstone round their necks. See Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, 31-32.

before it ever reaches the congregation.[53] But once it has been proven, it is delivered as rich food for the flock of God by the skill of the shepherd and the enablement of the Holy Spirit.[54] In this Owen is not naïve about the difficulties a minister will face.

> It is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach than our hearts to preach. To bring our heads to preach, is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth, of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others: this is very easy. But to bring our hearts to preach, is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them, both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts, and in delivering of them, that we may have benefit; and to be acted with zeal for God and compassion to the souls of men. A man may preach every day in the week, and not have his heart engaged once.[55]

The minister is not to give merely intellectual content to the congregation. Instead, Owen preaches that pastors must themselves be "transformed" through the strength of scripture and its doctrine, and through that strength they are then effective to deliver God's word with all its power to his people.[56] Theology is first lived, then given.

For the congregation to be well cared for, that care for the congregation needs to flow from the minister's own soul first. Ministers, in Owen's understanding, are not merely preaching to their audiences, they are also preaching to themselves. They are to give the congregation the benefit of what they themselves have received. In Owen's congregational theology, the minister was both a shepherd and a member of the flock. What is delivered to the congregation, whether in a sermon or throughout the routine course of pastoral care, must be lived first in the minister's own life. Owen writes that it is absolutely essential that

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[53] He warns ministers that they "may administer that consolation out of the word unto their flock which themselves never tasted, — preach to others, and be themselves cast-aways." Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.25.

[54] Owen writes of the importance of the pastor to preach the sort of sermons that the congregation needs: specifically related to their lives. "Without a due regard unto these things, men preach at random, uncertainly fighting, like those that beat the air. Preaching sermons not designed for the advantage of them to whom they are preached; insisting on general doctrines not levelled to the condition of the auditory; speaking what men can, without consideration of what they ought,—are things that will make men weary of preaching, when their minds are not influenced with outward advantages, as much as make others weary in hearing of them." *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.76-77.

[55] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.455.

[56] Owen sees this practical focus to pastoral ministry as being essential to the effectiveness of preaching. "All these, in the whole discharge of their duty, are to be constantly accompanied with the evidence of zeal for the glory of God and compassion for the souls of men. Where these are not in vigorous exercise in the minds and souls of them that preach the word, giving a demonstration of themselves unto the consciences of them that hear, the quickening form, the life and soul of preaching, is lost." *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.77.

ministers "experience of the power of the things we preach to others."[57] Those who do not experience first what they give to their congregations have no way of ensuring they are providing what their congregations actually need.

> He who doth not feed on, and digest, and thrive by, what he prepares for his people, he may give them poison, as far as he knows; for, unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence that it will have power in the hearts of others.[58]

Owen's concern that ministers might give their people poison shows the necessity of an experienced theology in the life of pastoral ministry. This point demonstrates the practical emphasis in Owen's theoretico-practical theology. Theology is developed with both an eye to scripture and a consideration of the needs of the flock. Owen demonstrated this himself as he preached at an ordination service for a new minister, giving emphasis to what that minister needed for an effective pastoral ministry to the congregation.[59] It was as if Owen was saying, "Do not give your congregation what you haven't proven in your own life. Do not experiment your theology on them. Give them what you have already demonstrated is true and effective."

Owen's preaching points to the need for ministers to experience theology rather than simply preaching it. By the time of Owen's work on his mature pastoral theology, he was at the end of his life. He had written a considerable Latin treatise on the history of revelation and a massive commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. He had served as the vice-chancellor of one of the world's oldest universities and defended orthodox theology against the onslaught of anti-trinitarian heresies. He had participated in the rise and the fall of the Cromwellian regime. He had seen a king executed and governments toppled. He had been a

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[57] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.455. The *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* makes a similar point when it urges ministers to seek to get both their own hearts and their "hearers' hearts to be rightly affected with their sins, that they may mourn in sense therefore before the Lord, and hunger and thirst after the grace of God in Jesus Christ." In *The Westminster Confession,* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 555. Pastoral effectiveness flows, at least in part, from the level to which pastors themselves are impacted by what they teach and do.
[58] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.455.
[59] Ibid. 452.

pastor in a successful congregation and he had been the minister of a tiny congregation of political exiles. He had written high orthodox reformed theology, and he had contributed to the Congregational churches' adaptation of the Westminster Confession of Faith to their own polity after the Restoration. Owen was a veteran of the political, academic, and theological systems of his days, and by the time of this sermon his life was nearly over. What message did he have as a result of his years of experience? "No man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart."[60]

Owen regularly refers to these gifts, abilities, and endowments which God gives ministers throughout his writings on pastoral theology.[61] This emphasis can be seen as analogous to his concept of disposition, even though the specific terminology of disposition is absent from Owen's early pastoral works. Indeed, in his later pastoral writings he uses gifts, abilities, and endowments as synonymous with the concept of disposition. As is his habit, Owen uses clusters of words to describe an idea rather than using only one precise term, but the point is the same: Owen reminds pastors that they must seek divine enablement, i.e. an infused disposition, from the one who alone is able to grant it.

> By virtue of his relation unto the church as its head, of his kingly power over it and care of it, whereon the continuation and edification of the church in this world do depend, wherever he hath a church called, he furnisheth some persons with such gifts, abilities, and endowments as are necessary to the discharge of such offices, in the powers, works, and duties of them; for it is most unquestionably evident, both in the nature of the thing itself and in his institution, that there are some especial abilities and qualifications required to the discharge of every church-office.[62]

God provides for pastors the very qualifications he requires of them, whether that be through gifts, abilities, endowments, or dispositions and this provision should be seen as an essential element of the pastor's fitness for pastoral ministry.

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[60] Ibid. 455.

[61] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.47; *Eschol: A Cluster of a Fruit of Canaan,* 13.55; *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches,* 15.337; *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,* 15.497-499, 503; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.38, 46, 49, 67, 73, 75, 83.

[62] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.38. See chapters 6-8 of Owen's *Discourse of Spiritual Gifts*, 4.420-519 for more on the broader theological development of these graces and gifts that God gives for ministry in the church.

This dispositional suitability as a result of infused capacities is something that should be seen as significant by both pastor and congregation. While the term shepherd emphasises the minister's mindset for ministry, Owen sees the pastoral disposition itself as coming from God through the Holy Spirit not merely for the pastor's own benefit but also for the good of the whole church.[63] Much of what Owen wrote about the pastoral disposition was in the context of writing to congregations about their need to look for qualified pastoral candidates, but Owen also has much to say about this matter to pastors themselves.[64] Owen's ordination sermons, as well as his more general writings to the church, show that Owen believes this divinely sourced ministerial disposition is central to a right understanding of pastoral practice.[65]

As the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of these gifts and abilities, he gives these gifts and abilities, in part, so that churches are able to test and demonstrate the pastor's suitability for ministry. "These are those spiritual endowments which the Lord Christ grants and the Holy Spirit works in the minds of men, for this very end that the church may be

[63] Owen is clear that this gifting is an absolute prerequisite for pastoral ministry, and without this gifting no one should attempt take the responsibility of the pastorate. "That for a public, formal, ministerial teaching, two things are required in the teacher: — first, Gifts from God; secondly, Authority from the church (I speak now of ordinary cases). He that wants either is no true pastor." *Sermons,* 9.43.

[64] Three ordination sermons, written and delivered later in Owen's life, provide a useful window into what sort of disposition Owen thought was important to emphasise as a pastor to other pastors. Owen seems to have been a popular speaker within nonconformist churches. These three ordination sermons are part of a larger collection of sermons for gathered congregations that was published in 1756 (included in volume 9 of the current edition of Owen's collected works), one of several such collections that were published in the early-mid 18th century. The notations at the bottom of these particular sermons shows that Owen was regularly preaching away from his own congregation at ordination services for new ministers, though the final ordination sermon may have been one Owen preached at his own congregation for the induction of his successor David Clarkson. See Gribben, *John Owen,* 259. For more on Owen's involvement in other churches see Toon, *God's Statesman*, 163, and Gribben, *John Owen*, 240. This information fills in some of the gaps that exist in the record of Owen's absences from his own congregation. Sometimes he preached near his estate in Stadham, other times he was a requested speaker at a ministers' event. Earlier in Owen's pastoral career, Essex minister Ralph Josselin made several references in his diary to Owen's presence at groups of ministers gathered for mutual edification, and it seems Owen kept up the practice through his life. See Alan MacFarlane, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin; 1616-1683*, 98, 163.

[65] In one of Owen's ordination sermons, delivered in 1678, Owen notes that he is speaking to "a church of ancient standing." *Sermons,* 9.441. Given that most nonconformist ministers that had been a part of the Church of England were expelled from their congregations in 1662, it seems likely that Owen was speaking to a congregation that had been nonconformist before the Act of Uniformity and had been outside the state church, perhaps a Baptist or older sort of Congregational church. This gives further evidence to Owen's prominence among nonconformist churches after the Restoration.

profited by them."[66] The infusion of this disposition in pastors is one of the ways God continually provides gifts for the benefit of the people in the church. The presence of this infused disposition is how Christ's approval of a minister may be known, as "none can or may take this office upon him, or discharge the duties of it, which are peculiarly its own, with authority, but he who is called and set apart thereunto according to the mind of Jesus Christ."[67] Pastors who possess this disposition are both undergoing the Spirit's regenerating work and are also suited for the work of caring for particular congregations.

Not only does Owen emphasise the necessity of receiving gifts from God for pastoral ministry, he also points out that strengthening the disposition is a work God encourages and helps his people in, and that the gift of the disposition should be an encouragement to pastors in their tasks. God gives his people good dispositions for the purpose of moving their inclination towards what brings him glory.[68] A work of infusion is the formal beginning of a good disposition, but it is also a key piece of the pastor being able to develop the skills required for effective pastoral ministry as well.[69] Owen repeatedly makes this point throughout his preaching: Christians need a God-ward disposition, and pastors are no exception to this need. This disposition can only come from a Spirit-infused inclination that opposes the sinful tendencies of the natural self. But this disposition is an essential part of the Christian life that enables a Christian to even desire to bring glory to God.[70] In Owen's

[66] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.55.
[67] Ibid. 51.
[68] DWL, MSS L6/2 (back half), 39. This is the same emphasis he makes in *On Communion with God*, 2.172.
[69] Owen's usual custom of preaching, at least before his congregation joined with Joseph Caryl's, was to preach lengthy series on single verse. He spent a considerable amount of time preaching on John 3.3, and in these sermons, he focused on the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in the new birth. His next series of sermons was on the end of the book of Hebrews, and he preached five sermons on Hebrews 12.14 alone. Where previously Owen had preached on the new birth, at this point he was addressing the need of Christians to focus on holiness. But the two sides of the disposition, the initial gift from God and the subsequent human responsibility for increase, were clearly larger emphases in his theology. In these sermons we see Owen linking the dots between the idea of disposition and the theology of personal sanctification in the life of the believer. See DWL MSS L6/2, with a particular focus on the sermons delivered 4 March 1669/70, 18 March 1669/70, and 19 November 1671.
[70] DWL MSS L6/2 (back half), 45, 63.

concept of disposition, God gives his people, both pastors and congregants, what they need to move towards him.

Owen's emphasis on the infused disposition for pastoral theology also connects pastoral practice with his broader theology of God's grace. His understanding of God's dealing with his creation could be defined by God's essentially gracious disposition towards his people.[71] That God is even willing to provide such a gift as a disposition to his created beings is evidence of his care for his people. As Willem van Asselt says of another of Owen's theological developments, "the covenant presupposes a knowledge of God that has as its object not an exclusively transcendent God, but a God who enters into a relationship with humanity and human reality."[72] Owen believes in a God who graciously condescended to fallen humanity not only in order to save them, but also to enable them to accomplish the responsibilities he lays out for them in his word.[73] Whether through the covenant of redemption or in the enablement of an ordinary minister to serve a small congregation, God deals graciously with his people. God's gracious disposition towards his people as demonstrated through his covenants should result in ministers' gracious dispositions towards their people so that they may provide a practical demonstration of God's character in their regular ministry.

Owen repeats one particular theme throughout his participation in these ordination sermons: the Holy Spirit himself gives the dispositional gifting and enabling that is necessary for the responsibilities of pastoral ministry. He emphasises that "the Holy Ghost thus promised, thus sent, thus given, doth furnish the ministers of the gospel, according to his

[71] "God himself, in and by his own sovereign wisdom, grace, goodness, all-sufficiency, and power, is to be considered as the only cause and author of the new covenant; or, the abolishing of the old covenant, with the introduction and establishment of the new, is an act of the mere sovereign wisdom, grace, and authority of God. It is his gracious disposal of us, and of his own grace; — that whereof we had no contrivance, nor indeed the least desire." Owen, *Hebrews 8.10-12,* 23/24.138. See also, Owen, *A Discourse on the Work of the Holy Spirit,* 4.256.

[72] Willem van Asselt, "Covenant Theology as Relational Theology," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 83.

[73] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.512; 218-219.

mind, with spiritual abilities in the discharge of their work; and without it they are no way fitted for nor able to it," and that pastors would be in "no way accepted with Christ in what they do, nor can give any faithful account of what they undertake" if they attempted the care of souls without the appropriate disposition and gifting.[74]

Owen also makes clear to separate his understanding of supernatural enablement from that which is merely "natural endowments and acquired abilities."[75] In other words, the pastoral disposition is divinely infused rather than naturally acquired. Natural ability is important, but it is no demonstration of the pastoral disposition. Owen warns against putting too much stock in natural ability anyway.[76] It is hard to overstate the significance of Owen's insistence on the divine source of the pastoral disposition. To be a faithful pastor, at least in Owen's explanation, one needs abilities directly given by God. To paraphrase and apply what Owen says elsewhere of divinely infused grace, whatever of natural ability is useful for pastoral ministry, at its core pastoral ministry requires that which far "exceeds the sphere" of normal human ability.[77] Service in the church, in Owen's theology, is no ordinary responsibility. This point should not be one that, on the one hand, fills pastors with self-pity at the difficulty of their task, or on the other, inflates their egos at the uniqueness of their calling. Owen has little patience with either mindset. Rather, in Owen's estimation, the necessity of divinely infused gifting should drive pastors to daily dependence upon God for that which they need to appropriately care for his people. For apart from God's gracious gift to ministers, there is no other way of acquiring this disposition. God gives pastors the inclinations towards himself and towards his people that enables them to fulfil the obligations of ministry in the church.

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[74] Owen, *Sermons,* 9.447.
[75] Ibid. 442.
[76] "And I do not know a warning that I judge more necessary to be given those who are called this day, than to charge them not to trade too much with their natural gifts, and abilities, and learning," Ibid. 448.
[77] See Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.525.

Owen sees divine assistance particularly through the pastoral disposition in the church as central to the church's existence. It is especially through this spiritual enablement Christ gives pastors for ministry that Christ is present in the church.[78] Without the gifts God provided as a part of the pastoral disposition, Owen did not believe the church could continue.[79] This infusion of ministry gifts in the present runs parallel to the Holy Spirit's work in the early church. Owen refers to the apostles' miraculous gifts in the beginning of the early church as an instance of a disposition coming immediately from God. Though the apostles did not actively seek the ability to provide miraculous healing, it was to be expected that God would provide this ability as part of his special call upon their lives.[80] Although Owen also understood the miraculous gifts to be largely constrained to scriptural times, he also taught that the disposition required for pastoral ministry might seem rather more mundane but is no less supernatural.[81] God still provides what is needed to enable his ministers to accomplish his purposes with his people.

Thus if those extraordinarily called, such as apostles, are the recipients of extraordinary gifting, Owen also emphasises the ordinary assistance given to those called to pastoral ministry in "ordinary cases".[82] He encourages his readers that "God sends none upon an employment but whom he fits with gifts for it."[83] These early works of Owen's pastoral theology show us the seeds of Owen's theology of the pastoral disposition. God "fits" pastors

[78] "No church would have a relation unto Jesus Christ as the mystical head, if God should cease to communicate the Spirit as to gifts. For the outward administration and form of the church, whatever order you bring into it, cannot be accounted a church of Christ, unless there be the presence of Christ in it." Owen, *Sermons*, 9.447.
[79] "I profess to you I had rather a thousand times be of their opinion, bad as it is, who say that all church-state is ceased, than that there may be a church-state when these gifts and graces are not. If I did not see these graces and gifts continued to some, to keep up the ordinances of the church in some measure, I should believe it had ceased." Owen, *Sermons*, 9.449. N.B.: Remember that Owen is here merging the distinction between gifts and dispositions.
[80] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.32. The judges and prophets in the Old Testament were similarly given a disposition to miraculous abilities, extraordinary strength, the power to work miracles, and control over nature, as a part of their divine calling to a specific task from God. Owen sees that an unusual call from God is usually accompanied by unusual gifts from God. Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.31.
[81] Ibid. 33.
[82] Ibid. 43.
[83] Ibid.

with the appropriate, or fitting, gifting for pastoral ministry, what Owen will later explain as the pastoral disposition. A pastor who lacks this particular endowment has no ground for presuming upon the pastoral office.[84] Owen distinguishes between gifts that are given "for the sanctification of God's people" and those that are given "for the edification of his church."[85] Whether he refers to individual gifts or gifts given for the benefit of the whole body, Owen is clear that every ministerial gifting must be understood as "coming down from the Father of lights," and he emphasises that these gifts are all "given by the same Spirit."[86] God infuses the disposition to his ministers that is necessary for the enablement of service in his church.

Owen warns that Protestant ministers neglect this idea to their peril, pointing out the danger of inadequately emphasising the concept of gracious dispositions as a part of understanding God's gracious dealings with humanity in redemption and regeneration.[87] How much more significant is it for those whose responsibility it is to explain that redemption and regeneration to God's people on a regular basis to know how God gives them the gracious disposition that enables their ministry? Neglecting infused dispositions for pastoral ministry will result in one focusing only on acquired ability, an over emphasis on skills. One theological approach may do so under the guise of pursuing a more "biblical" approach to pastoral ministry, and another may do so under the pursuit of "pastoral relevance," but the result is the same: an exclusive emphasis on human ability to accomplish that which Owen insists can only be accomplished through a divinely infused capacity.

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid. 44. Owen connects the fruit of the Spirit to the sanctifying gifts given for person benefit and the "spiritual gifts of teaching, praying, prophesying" to the edifying gifts given for corporate benefit.
[86] Ibid.
[87] See Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.330.

**Exists Prior to the Office**

In Owen's theology, the pastoral disposition is a key prerequisite for ministry in the church. Owen preached at an ordination sermon not long after his congregation merged with Joseph Caryl's,

> That it is the work of the Spirit of God, in all ages of the church, to communicate spiritual gifts and abilities to those who are called according unto his mind to the ministry of the church, to enable them unto all evangelical administrations, to his glory, and the edification of the church.[88]

God has given his ministers gifts by which he is to be served in his church. Owen clearly believes that ministry gifts are essential to the pastoral disposition, for it is through the presence of this ministerial gifting that the pastoral disposition is demonstrated.[89] Not only is the disposition demonstrated through these gifts, but they are also the key to understanding and practising the "order of Christ in the church."[90] As Owen states in another ordination sermon, "The original of all church order and rule is in gifts; the exercise of those gifts is by office; the end of all those gifts and offices is, edification."[91] God has given congregations clear indications of what to look for in pastors; the qualities that make a good pastor are shown through the scriptural qualifications for pastoral ministry. Owen tells his readers to look for demonstrations that a pastor is endowed with the gifts Christ promised to provide for the service of his church.

This is why Owen makes such a point of urging churches to properly evaluate candidates for the ministry.

> This collation of spiritual gifts and abilities for office by Jesus Christ unto any doth not immediately constitute all those, or any of them, officers in the church, on whom

[88] Owen, *Sermons,* 9.442.

[89] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.54. Amongst Owen's many complaints against prayer-book services in the national Anglican church he lists that "It hath set up and warranted an *ungifted* ministry." *An Answer Unto Two Questions*, 16.252 (emphasis mine).

[90] Owen, *Sermons,* 9.453.

[91] Ibid.. We see the importance of gifts for pastor ministry in his statement "That gifts are the foundation of all church work, whether it be in office or out of office. 'Having therefore gifts, let us,' saith the apostle, do so and so. If there be no spiritual gifts, there is no spiritual work. Spiritual gifts are the foundation of office, which is the foundation of work in the church, and of all gospel administrations in a special manner, according to the gifts received." Ibid. 449.

> they are collated, without the observation of that method and order which he hath appointed in the church for the communication of office-power; yet is it so pre-requisite thereunto, that no person not made partaker of them in the measure before mentioned can, by virtue of any outward rite, order, or power, be really vested in the ministry." [92]

This comment shows that Owen believes the disposition exists independent of the office. Taking the office of pastor does not give one the disposition for church ministry, and "for men to pretend themselves pastors of the church, and to be unable for, or negligent of, this work and duty, is to live in open defiance of the commands of Christ."[93] Owen complained of the impact of pastors who did not believe the things they were preaching.[94] This sort of neglect was not an uncommon aspect of pastoral ministry in Owen's day.[95] Owen repeatedly notes that a congregation must evaluate a potential pastor based on their experience of his life.[96] He assumes that congregations will have some level of familiarity with potential pastoral applicants and will be in a position to critically engage with their qualifications or observe the lack thereof.[97] Owen goes even farther and warns potential pastors against taking the pastoral office without the appropriate disposition.[98] "Nothing can be more wicked or foolish than for a man to intrude himself into a trust which was not committed unto him."[99] Simply stepping into the role of pastor does not give one the pastoral disposition.

> Whoever, therefore, takes upon him the pastoral office without a lawful outward call, doth take unto himself power and authority without any divine warranty, which is a foundation of all disorder and confusion; interests himself in an accountable trust no way committed unto him; hath no promise of assistance in or reward for his work, but

[92] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.38.
[93] Ibid. 75.
[94] "And no man lives in a more woful [sic] condition than those who really believe not themselves what they persuade others to believe continually. The want of this experience of the power of gospel truth on their own souls is that which gives us so many lifeless, sapless orations, quaint in words and dead as to power, instead of preaching the gospel in the demonstration of the Spirit." Ibid. 76.
[95] For more on how local parishes responded to this sort of neglect, see Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, 115.
[96] "[N]o man can in an orderly way and manner be called or set apart unto this office in whom there are not some indications of God's designation of him thereunto by his furniture with spiritual gifts." Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.50.
[97] "The church is not to call or choose any one to office who is not known unto them… And we must at present take it for granted that every true church of Christ…is able to judge in some competent measure what gifts of men are suited unto their own edification."" Ibid. 54-55.
[98] Ibid. 49-50, 51.
[99] Ibid. 53.

> engageth in that which is destructive of all church-order, and consequently of the very being of the church itself.[100]

Possessing the disposition is an absolute prerequisite for pastoral ministry in Owen's theology. It is through this demonstrated disposition that a congregation can recognise a minister's legitimate claim to suitability for ministry. In fact, Owen seems to assume that the disposition will exist *before* one attempts to take the pastoral office. It is necessary for any potential minister that

> antecedently unto any actings of the church towards such a person with respect unto office, he be furnished by the Lord Christ himself with graces, and gifts, and abilities, for the discharge of the office whereunto he is to be called. This divine designation of the person to be called rests on the kingly office and care of Christ towards his church.[101]

One must have the character first; only then will the church be able to make an appropriate evaluation of one's fitness for the office.

Owen describes the pastor's duties in terms of the pastoral disposition. In other words, the disposition that is a prerequisite for the appropriate use of pastoral ministry is constituted by the very same character and actions that make up the pastoral ministry. It could be said that doing the work of pastoral ministry is a preliminary requirement for becoming a pastor. The skills that a pastor needs to hone once in the ministry are a continuation of the skills that person possessed prior to becoming a pastor. In other words, in most circumstances the pastoral disposition will exist and be demonstrable in the candidate before the candidate is installed in the pastoral office. If one does not have this disposition, simply possessing the office will not make that person "fit" for the office. Owen again laments the consequences of putting unqualified people in the pastoral office when he connects careless and incompetent pastors to "the present ruin of religion, as unto its power, beauty, and glory."[102] Simply taking

[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid. 73.
[102] Ibid. 89.

the office of elder does not grant one the necessary skills to fulfil the responsibilities of the office.

The office of pastor or minister presupposes the necessity of the pastoral disposition in the candidate. This point hints at the reality that the disposition must be developed over time; it is not simply gained or lost. One does not immediately become qualified to be a pastor. A disposition is not merely taken up or laid down at will; it must be utilised and developed over time. In Owen's explanation, this disposition must be present and able to be evaluated in one who wishes to be a pastor before taking the pastorate.

**Demonstrated through Pastoral Care**

Though pastoral ministry begins with the infusion of a pastoral disposition, that disposition then results in the "constant exercise of ministerial gifts." These gifts are exercised for the benefit of the sheep under one's pastoral care.[103] The presence of a pastoral disposition is demonstrated through the pastor's exercise of the triad of mind, will, and affections in the tasks that make up ministerial responsibilities and for the good of those in the church. These terms all show that pastoral ministry is a much more internal concept than mere tasks. A certain characteristic spirit is required in a minister beyond the talent for preaching interesting sermons or having a knack with people. There is a particular quality about a person that is necessary, a certain "endowment" that must be present if a minister is to be considered appropriately "gifted" for the pastoral ministry, but that gifting is revealed through the pastoral disposition one makes use of through the tasks of pastoral ministry.

The purpose of the pastoral disposition is to enable the pastor to appropriately minister to the congregation. Owen states that the pastor must demonstrate evidence of the pastoral disposition that the congregation is able to recognise. But what is the purpose of

[103] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.462.

these qualifications? Why is it so important that a congregation be able to verify a potential pastor's disposition for the ministry? Owen writes that upon recognition of the person's fitness for the pastoral office, the congregation gives "right and power for the regular use and exercise of gifts and abilities…unto the edification of the church."[104] This is the essence of a congregation functioning "according to rule and order" and a pastor functioning "in such due obedience."[105] Both the elder and the congregation have accountability for their various responsibilities and cooperation in the church being faithfully established. The pastoral disposition is an essential feature of the pastor being able to rightly carry out the tasks of pastoral ministry.

For Owen, the pastoral disposition is first and foremost the frame of mind, will, and affections in which a pastor carries out the ministry tasks in a congregation. The tasks of prayer, of catechising, of giving advice, of preaching, and of administering the sacraments could be accomplished by rote just as university lecturing can take place with no great interest in the material on the part of the lecturer. But whether in the lecture hall or in the church, the love and passion for one's subject makes a substantial difference. And the proper fulfilment of these duties was clearly a priority for puritan ministers in early modern England. The amount of time and energy they spent on catechisms and using them to instruct those in their own congregations bears this out.[106] Owen's own practise in this area demonstrates his commitment to giving his entire congregation access to the central doctrines of Christian faith, regardless of their level of education.[107]

A right use of pastoral affections in the congregation necessitates certain mindsets in the ministry. Chief of these is charity. Owen sees this mindset of love, to use the modern

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[104] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49. Walther points to the object of the pastoral disposition as the sort of practical theology that is mediated through "the practice, the activity, or the official acts of a minister– in a word, of ecclesiastical ministry." In *Pastoral Theology*, 8.
[105] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49.
[106] Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239.
[107] Carl Trueman, "Reformers, puritans, and evangelicals," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism,* ed by Deryck W. Lovegrove, (London: Routledge, 2002), 30.

equivalent, as being essential to appropriate fulfilment of pastoral duties. Intellectual assent to theological content is insufficient for pastoral responsibilities. Mental affirmation alone often leads to arrogance on the part of the minister, whereas a love for one's congregation gives one the ability to truly accomplish ministry.[108] In describing the New Testament's use of the word pastor as a description of the minister's responsibility, Owen states that, "this name or appellation is taken from and includes in it love, care, tenderness, watchfulness, in all the duties of going before, preserving, feeding, defending the flock, the sheep and the lambs, the strong, the weak, and the diseased, with accountableness, as servants, unto the chief Shepherd."[109] It is this love and care for one's congregation that marks the essential disposition of pastoral ministry as demonstrated through ministerial duties.

Owen poignantly describes the necessity of this disposition for the right sort of care a pastor is to provide for the flock. "We should never be commanded to open our wounds to them who have no balm to pour into them; he shall have cold comfort who seeks for counsel from a dumb man."[110] Here Owen describes the mindset that is necessary to accomplish ministry to Christ's flock. This mindset has an essentially dispositive element to it. While love, care, tenderness, and watchfulness may certainly be natural characteristics in some people, they are far more often skills that must be developed. They must be honed if they are to be used at their greatest potential. In fact, without constant attention to developing these skills, as with human muscles, dispositional atrophy will set in.

Another aspect of the proper disposition to develop a right practice of pastoral ministry in Owen's explanation is a deeply felt understanding of one's own responsibility for the flock. The difficulty of parish ministry in Owen's day was well known, and many pastors felt their labours were completely wasted among the people to whom they ministered.[111]

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[108] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.49.
[109] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49.
[110] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.46.
[111] Hunt, *The Art of Hearing,* 234-238.

Discouragement could quickly set in. Owen offers a caution for the minister, regardless of the size of the congregation.

> If men would but a little seriously consider what there is in that care of souls, even of all them over whom they pretend church power, rule, or jurisdiction, and what it is to give an account concerning them before the judgment-seat of Christ, it may be it would abate of their earnestness in contending for the enlargement of their cures.[112]

The right application and use of pastoral ministry are far more important than the "enlargement" of one's church or apparent success. Care for the flock is what matters. Owen places the pastoral ministry back under the accountability promised by Christ in the New Testament. In his thought, regardless of how effective or relevant other aspects of the pastor's ministry may be, if this sort of ambition is present in the minister, it is likely that the more central qualification of the pastoral disposition is absent.

In what sort of areas then, is this essential pastoral disposition demonstrated? What impact does it have on Owen's explanation of pastoral ministry? How is it practically demonstrated in the pastoral work? A list from *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, Owen's posthumously published church manual, forms a comprehensive treatment of both the pastor's responsibility and what is required for the right fulfilment of that responsibility. In other words, Owen prioritises the disposition over acts, for it is from the pastoral disposition that the acts of pastoral care follow. The list in Owen's manual for pastoral care also demonstrates that necessity of a certain disposition for the accomplishment of these ministry tasks. In the fifth chapter of this work, his treatment on "The especial duty of pastors of churches," Owen lays out eleven central responsibilities of pastors in their ministry setting (the specific language is Owen's):

1. Feed the flock by diligently preaching the word.
2. Continual fervent prayer for his flock.

[112] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 16.43.

3. Administration of the seals of the covenant [the sacraments] as stewards of the house of Christ.
4. Preservation and defence of the truth or doctrine of the gospel received and professed by the church.
5. Labour for the conversion of souls unto God.
6. Be ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those that are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation, in times of trial and desertion.
7. Compassionate suffering with the members of the church in their trials or troubles, whether internal or external.
8. Care of the poor and visitation of the sick.
9. Care of the rule of the church.
10. Observe fellowship together with all churches of the same faith and profession in a nation.
11. Have humble, holy, and exemplary conversation in all godliness and honesty.[113]

Notice how many of these responsibilities necessitate the presence of a particularly pastoral disposition. This disposition enables pastoral care. In other words, the pastoral disposition leads to certain pastoral tasks, and enablement in pastoral tasks flows from the pastoral disposition. Words such as diligence, fervency, defence, labour, and care all point much more to a mindset than to mere jobs, though there are certain responsibilities that are clearly in view in this passage. Owen is describing a certain inclination that is a core component of church work. Pastors make use of this disposition through their exercise of ordinary pastoral responsibilities. The disposition is not something extrinsic to and separated from pastoral care, it is what enables pastoral care. To suffer compassionately, one must have and evidence

[113] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.74-89. For the sake of space, I have omitted Owen's scriptural defence and larger explanation of these points.

a certain amount of care for those who are suffering. In order to be "ready, willing, and able," to help the tempted or comfort the discouraged, those in ministry have to have something that might today be called "people skills," and ability to be concerned with the situations and needs of those around them. These responsibilities are far easier to describe than to practise, yet Owen believed that the actual implementation of these responsibilities is where the centre of the pastoral disposition lies. In preaching, in counselling, in church leadership, and in daily conversation, the pastoral disposition informs what and how pastoral care is to be done in the life of the church.

Owen's list of pastoral responsibilities shows that biblical pastoral ministry is much more concerned with character than the accomplishment of specific tasks, for it is through right character that these tasks will be effectively accomplished. In other word, the tasks and responsibilities of pastoral ministry are, in Owen's estimation, rightly and usefully accomplished only through the pastoral disposition. Pastoral care is a matter of the inward disposition of the minister. Owen understands the ability to complete the tasks of pastoral ministry to depend on virtuous character for the right implementation of those tasks. But that is exactly the point. Owen's understanding of pastoral ministry is something much deeper than simply fulfilling the obligations of a Sunday service then going one's way, problems which congregations in Owen's day certainly faced.[114] Owen describes a type of person, a mindset, an essential skill set that involves a certain attitude, that is "fitted" for pastoral ministry. This disposition is more important than an ability to preach an engaging sermon or write a theological treatment of a certain topic. Though making use of the pastoral disposition and the inclination towards the flock preaching and writing become useful for the church. The right exercise of ministry abilities gives evidence of the pastoral disposition, and the

[114] On the problems of pluralism and non-residence (serving more than one parish at a time and residing away from one's particular parish) and the difficult these practices could cause in parish ministry, see Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger,* 115-117.

pastoral disposition is demonstrated through the various pastoral actions that require ministerial gifting. Right pastoral care flows from the pastoral disposition.

Nowhere in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* does Owen ever emphasise that the pastor must be a scholar or even be university educated, though he himself had benefitted from a substantial education. Other than treatments written specifically for one's congregation, Owen does not prioritise a pastor's ability to write, though he had certainly written voluminously. Owen's pastoral disposition then is a mindset, a disposition or inclination, a personal character that lives in a certain relationship both with God and the congregation where one serves as pastor. A pastor is to be consumed with "zeal for the glory of God" as Jesus Christ was, but that zeal was to exist alongside a "watchfulness of the whole flock." Rather than making one aloof from a congregation, this zeal ensures greater concern for the flock. A minister is to be "holy, harmless, undefiled," yet that personal holiness also includes "compassion and love to the flock."[115] The pastor's holiness fights against a tendency to separate oneself from the congregation and helps maintain an empathetic concern for the congregation. This disposition is what gives pastoral preaching its fire. This disposition is what enables a pastor to connect the importance of the sacraments to daily life for a congregation. And it is this disposition that enables a pastor to provide the needed pastoral counsel, especially in difficult or controversial matters. As Richard Baxter established in *The Reformed Pastor*, a minister who is only concerned with light and trivial matters in personal life is unlikely to be taken seriously when offering critique or counsel on matters of consequence.[116] Baxter's work is likely one of the most fiery elaborations of the pastoral disposition written at the time.[117] Yet Owen and Baxter both made certain to help

[115] On inappropriate behaviour of ministers and its effect on their pastoral ministry, see ibid. 122-132.
[116] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 1.1.3-5.
[117] Baxter does not make much of the specific language of disposition in his treatment. Yet the concept, at least as was commonly understood in the day, that of a personal mindset, or habitual character, is clearly throughout the work. Perhaps Baxter did not use the terminology because of the nature of his own self-taught education. Owen was used to learning in an academic setting and had gained a scholastic vocabulary early in life, whereas

pastors understand that this disposition was given by Christ to pastors to ensure the right "edification of his church."[118]

Though one might be able to accomplish certain of these duties by rote and without careful attention to how they ought to be fulfilled, clearly this list involves a great amount of pastoral inclination and skill for effective execution of these duties. Owen gives a sharp call to faithfulness especially regarding the care for the flock through the act of preaching, but his warning applies to the other duties as well:

> This work and duty, therefore, as was said, is essential unto the office of a pastor. A man is a pastor unto them whom he leads by pastoral teaching, and to no more; and he that doth not so feed is no pastor. Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure, but that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, all other duties in the church, as unto such a constant attendance on them as would divert him from this work, that he give himself unto it, — that he be in these things labouring to the utmost of his ability. Without this no man will be able to give a comfortable account of the pastoral office at the last day.[119]

These are abilities that take effort to attain and skill to maintain. The art of preaching was especially prized in puritan England, so the ability to skilfully learn and apply the tasks of ministry would have been a necessity for one who desired the ministerial office.[120] This was no easy task, especially considering the expectations of those who were leading the puritan project.[121] Nor was their perseverance in these responsibilities particularly safe. Owen was constantly in danger in his own ministry situation, and he faced regular government surveillance.[122] Pastoral ministry in his day was a risky business, with ministers having to constantly consider their obligations as members of society against their obligations to God

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Baxter developed his theological understanding largely through his own efforts. Though in certain specific theological matters Owen and Baxter could write vociferously against each other, in their understanding of caring for the flock in pastoral ministry, there was much they held in common.

[118] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.51.

[119] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.75. See Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 11-12.

[120] See Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, 19-59, for an extended discussion of preaching in early modern England.

[121] Ian M. Green, *Continuity and Change in Protestant Preaching in Early Modern England,* (London: Dr. William's Trust, 2009), 11-12.

[122] This was a significant consequence of the ongoing "legal harassment of dissenters" that Owen and his fellow nonconformist ministers be forced to endure during the entirety of their ministries in London. See De Krey, *London and the Restoration,* 242.

as leaders of churches.[123] Yet the necessity of the pastoral disposition meant that pastors were to examine themselves to see if they had the right characteristics for shepherding God's flock. They were not to take up the mantle of pastoral responsibilities if the skills and abilities that demonstrated the presence of a pastoral disposition were absent.

Owen emphasises mastery of the ministerial craft through the cultivation of the pastoral disposition. This responsibility of caring for souls was no easy job in his conception of it. Consider the words Owen used to describe these duties: diligently, continual, labour, compassionate, exemplary. These words define not just the craft but the means of accomplishing mastery of that craft. Diligent and continual labour was the way ministers demonstrated that they had the particular skills, the essential pastoral disposition, involved in each of these tasks. Compassion and an exemplary lifestyle give the minister the necessary character markers so as to be able to engage with congregants in a meaningful way.

## Conclusion

In Owen's elaboration, the pastoral disposition is fundamentally the disposition of a shepherd toward the flock of God. As is the case with all dispositions necessary for distinctly Christian purposes in Owen's theology, the pastoral disposition is a gift the Holy Spirit infuses into believers for the enablement of divine purposes in the minister's life and practice. Owen also emphasises the importance of the pastoral disposition existing prior to a pastor's taking a congregation. This qualification is a key way that a congregation is able to evaluate the ministerial fitness of a potential pastoral candidate. This disposition is demonstrated through the tasks of pastoral ministry and the responsibilities of pastoral care. The pastoral

[123] "These dissenting authors were also actually experiencing coercion that they believed violated their consciences, infringed their civil rights, and required them either to disobey God or to disobey the state. Reformed Protestant authors like John Owen and John Humfrey nevertheless counselled their followers to 'quietly and peaceably…bear the troubles and inconveniences' of their dissent, while respecting the authority of the magistrate." This does not mean they were not concerned about the difficulties they faced, however. For "they publicly shuddered about the consequences for the state of the perpetuation of persecution. Owen noted that 'magistrates who coerce conscience must irresistibly extinguish the community itself.'" Ibid. 104.

disposition is a key qualification in Owen's understanding of pastoral ministry, and it forms the backbone of all that Owen understands ministers both to be and to do.

## Chapter 7 – The Pastoral Disposition in Owen: How it is Used

Now that we have explored the idea of what the pastoral disposition is, it is now time to examine how the pastoral disposition is to be used. Owen points to the necessity of making use of the pastoral disposition for the benefit of a local congregation. He emphasises the need for sanctification in one's own disposition, not only as a Christian but also as a pastor. And he also demonstrates the importance of using the pastoral disposition for the purpose of specific immediate and ultimate ends. This section will be focused on the proper sphere, improvement, and use of the pastoral disposition.

### Congregationally Focused

Where is the primary location for the use of this pastoral disposition? Where is a minister to best hone these abilities? Owen consistently writes for the church throughout his lifetime. One comment stands out as particularly emphasising Owen's understanding of the importance of the church in Owen's theology:

> There is a greater glory in giving a minister to a poor congregation, than there is in the instalment and enthroning of all the popes, and cardinals, and metropolitans, that ever were in the world: let their glory be what it will, Christ is upon his theatre of glory in the communication of this office and these officers.[1]

Owen showed this commitment to the church in his own life and ministry, as he spent a greater portion of his life in pastoral ministry than he did either in academic or political work. Beginning to end, Owen was a pastor. Unsurprisingly then, his written work bears testimony to the importance of the local church in his life. His usage of the concept of disposition is especially pronounced in his writings for local church pastors and their ministry in local congregational churches. It is the local church emphasis in Owen's writings on the pastoral

[1] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.439. The necessity of "an ecclesial perspective and purpose" is still recognised within studies in practical theology today. See Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 11, 123.

disposition that grounds his pastoral theology and ensures it keeps a significantly practical dimension.

Owen emphasises that the place the pastoral disposition should be developed and practised is within the local congregation. Though not a Congregationalist, Senkbeil emphasises a similar relationship of the pastoral disposition to the congregation when he writes,

> pastoral skills are not acquired all at once, but honed and developed through deliberate and diligent interaction with the people of God. A genuinely pastoral demeanor grows within him as a pastor is actively engaged in the work of shepherding the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer. You learn by doing… There's no substitute for practice when it comes to the developing pastoral skills and aptitudes.[2]

The local congregation is in fact the proper place for the exercise of the minister's responsibilities, and it is the place where the minister can know those responsibilities will accomplish their intended purpose.[3] It is through the ordinary work of ministry among the flock that the pastor grows in the pastoral disposition. The pastor is "habituated–shaped and formed into a shepherd of souls–by being actively engaged in the work of shepherding."[4] The right place for the exercise of the pastoral disposition is in the church. Owen demonstrated this dedication to the church himself, as evidenced by his continual attachment to a church in some fashion or other despite his often-strenuous work assignments. In Owen's theology, it is in the church that believers "principally glorify God and give due honour unto Jesus Christ," especially when they "abide in our professed subjection unto him and observance of his commands against difficulties, oppositions, and persecutions."[5] Those who are attached in a pastoral capacity to a local congregation are to use the disposition they have been given in order to better serve those who have been placed by Christ under their spiritual oversight.

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[2] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 19-20.
[3] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.473.
[4] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 20.
[5] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.458-459.

Owen urges a two-fold emphasis on how the pastoral disposition is to be used: it enables right pastoral practice and it protects the church. He believes that a minister must possess a divinely infused disposition to be engaged in pastoral ministry. He could not understand anyone who would even want to join the pastoral ministry without this divine enablement from God, stating, "It is no pleasant thing unto flesh and blood to be engaged in the conduct and oversight of Christ's volunteers."[6] Congregations have the primary responsibility to observe the presence or absence of this disposition in those they wish to place over them as ministers. To be without gifting (and by extension the disposition in which the gifting is housed) is to be without warrant to teach. Owen was rather strict on this point. Anyone who lacks either gifts or a specific call from a church should not be placed in the ministry of word and sacrament, and it is the church's responsibility not to call an unsuitable minister to pastoral ministry. The local church is intimately a part of recognising and validating a minister's calling to ministry.[7] Owen's teaching on the pastoral disposition is intended to serve as a safeguard for churches.

Owen's emphasis on the local church's responsibility to evaluate a minister is one in which he firmly grounds himself in independent nonconformity. Even among the other major reformed scholastic group in Britain, the Presbyterians, this point was highly controversial.[8] Though later Presbyterianism would eventually allow for some measure of congregational recognition of a minister's call to the ministry, even occasioning a denominational split in the Church of Scotland over this point, in the mid seventeenth century the specific question of a congregation's involvement in the recognition and appointment of ministers was hotly

[6] Owen, *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches*, 15.197.
[7] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* 13.43; *A Brief instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.485.
[8] The Scottish Presbyterians were more interested in discussing the particulars of this discussion with the congregational divines than were the English Presbyterians. See Hunter Powell, *The Crisis of British Protestantism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 148-173 for a larger discussion of this point.

debated. Owen, however, found in scripture a substantial warrant for local congregations being involved in all appointments to pastoral positions.[9]

Owen's emphasis on the local church's involvement in ministerial calling demonstrates his commitment to furthering this understanding of the pastoral disposition. Owen's concept of pastoral ministry is deeply saturated with his theology of congregationalism.[10] In Owen's early ministry, Independency was only beginning to develop as a major player in the religious world of early modern England. Only a few members of the Westminster Assembly were Independents, and the English Civil Wars had not yet sealed their place as a substantial political force. Though the congregational view of church government was clearly in a minority at the Westminster Assembly, the Scottish members of the Assembly looked favourably on John Cotton's defence of congregationalism.[11] Cotton's work had significantly influenced Owen into becoming a Congregationalist during this time as well.[12] But by the end of the Commonwealth and through the Restoration, Independency had again been reduced to a background place in the national scene. Nonconformity became criminalised under the Acts of Uniformity, and nonconformist pastors had few protectors during those difficult years. Owen's commitment to his theology of the local church is demonstrated by his willingness to sign his name to controversial ideas at the times when nonconformists were the most vulnerable.[13] Early in Owen's days the Presbyterians were ascending in power. In Owen's later days, the Anglicans had resumed control. Outside of the Commonwealth years, helping the cause of the Independents had little political or religious

[9] This is part of the reason Owen's polity writings, despite being opposed to those of his Presbyterian contemporary Samuel Rutherford, became so popular in the Presbyterianism of early nineteenth century Scotland. See Gribben, *John Owen*, 60, 271-272.
[10] For more on the development of congregationalism in mid-seventeenth century England see Powell, *The Crisis of British Protestantism*, passim, and "October 1643: The Dissenting Brethren and the *Proton Dektikon*," in *Drawn Into Controversie*, ed by Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 52-82.
[11] Powell, *The Crisis of British Protestantism*, 148-149.
[12] Owen, *A Vindication of the Treatise on Schism*, 13.223.
[13] Owen did not sign his name to all his books, however. There were times when a technical anonymity was deemed prudent, even where his authorship of a work was well known. See Gribben, *John Owen*, 211, 216-220.

advantage for Owen personally, unless he was able to advance the cause of a group whose beliefs he sincerely avowed. Owen wrote these words to the Anglican dean of St. Pauls in response to a charge of profiting from the church:

> If the government of the church were apprehended to consist in men's giving themselves wholly to the word and prayer; in watching continually over the flock; in accurate carefulness to do and act nothing in the church but in the name and authority of Christ, by the warranty of his commands; with a constant exercise of all gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, which they have received, in these and all other duties of their office; and that without the least appearance of domination, or the procuring of dignity, secular honours, and revenues thereby, — it may be, a share and interest in it would not be so earnestly coveted and sought after as at present it is.[14]

That was exactly the sort of devotion to the requisite tasks that Owen believed a pastor needed to show to a congregation. Puritanism of the sort that led to nonconformity was a dangerous business.[15] Owen's teaching reminded the faithful of the sort of loyalty they would need to be able to withstand the turbulent times of the Restoration. That was the sort of faithfulness that would sustain a pastor through the rigours of ministry.

Owen's theology of the pastoral disposition has an important corporate dimension to it as well. His practical application of the ministerial disposition deals with Christians gathered in local churches learning how to function as local bodies of Christians. It is important not to overstate the "individualistic approach in [Owen's] understanding of the purpose of the church."[16] Owen clearly sees the commitment to a particular congregation as a matter of obedience for Christians.[17] It was through the church that "these ways and means of the worship of God" are revealed to believers."[18] He states that the "principal institutions of the gospel" are "to be observed" through the "settling of churches, with their officers, as the

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[14] Owen, *An Inquiry into the Original Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches*, 15.200.
[15] See Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59-114.
[16] Willem Van Vlastuin, "John Owen as a Modern Theologian: A Comparison of Catholicity in Cyprian and Owen," in *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* ed by Willem Van Vlastuin and Kelly M. Kapic, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 169.
[17] "it being, moreover, our duty to assemble ourselves in societies for the celebration of the worship of God in Christ, as that which is expressly commanded." Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity,* 15.185.
[18] Owen, *A Brief Instruction,* 15.449.

seat and subject of all other solemn instituted worship; prayer, with thanksgiving; singing of psalms; preaching the word; administration of the sacraments of baptism and the supper of the Lord; discipline and rule of the church collected and settled."[19] He believes that "moreover it is the will, command, and appointment of Christ, that they should be joined together in particular societies or churches."[20] The corporate gathering of God's people in the church is of profound importance in Owen's theology.[21] It is through preaching that the corporate nature of Christianity receives a significant emphasis in Owen's theology and practice.[22] This emphasis on the church as a critical means by which believers are sanctified is why he spends so much time writing to pastors and congregations on church matters.[23] Community with other believers was of central importance to Owen's understanding of what it means to be a Christian and to become Christ-like. This emphasis on who is able to belong to the community of believers, rather than a focus on individualism, is why Owen spends so much time explaining exactly what constitutes a Christian.

Congregations as well as pastors are also instructed how to discern between valid and invalid professions of faith, especially when administering the sacraments, precisely because of the importance of the doctrine of the church in Owen's theology.[24] It is most significantly through involvement with the church and dependence upon the means of grace that believers

[19] Ibid. 477.
[20] Ibid. 480. It is precisely through joining a particular congregation that one's participation in the universal church is demonstrated. Thus, is it only true that "the specific form of the visible church is of much less importance than the spiritual membership of the Catholic church" in Owen's theology if by "specific form" one means the particular denominational form. See Willem Van Vlastuin, "John Owen as a Modern Theologian: A Comparison of Catholicity in Cyprian and Owen," in *John Owen Between Orthodoxy and Modernity,* 169-170. But while church membership may be voluntary when considered as to which church a believer should join, church membership itself is mandatory for believers. It is because "members of the catholic church are not known unto one another merely on the account of that faith and union with Christ which make them so;" that "therefore particular churches are themselves an ordinance of the New Testament." Owen, *A Brief Instruction,* 15.480.
[21] The entirety of question 19 in Owen's congregational catechism deals with the primary importance of the church for believers. See ibid. 479-486.
[22] Martyn C. Cowan, *Portrait of a Prophet: Lessons from the Preaching of John Owen (1616-1683),* (London: The Latimer Trust, June 2016), 31-32.
[23] "There is no instruction, exhortation, or reproof given unto any of the disciples of Christ after his ascension, in any of the books of the New Testament, but as they were collected into and were members of such particular churches." Owen, *A Brief Instruction,* 15.484.
[24] Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion,* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 171.

can grow in sanctification.[25] Owen reminds his readers that it is the duty of all Christians to make sure that the teaching they are being given, including that from their local minister, is in accordance with sound doctrine.[26] The pastoral disposition is a means by which a congregation can evaluate a pastor as well.

Many theological factions existed in Owen's day. Protestantism placed the Bible at the centre of life and claimed everyone could have access to read and understand it. Opening the Bible up to all people was bound to produce a certain fracturing effect in the religious order of the time, and the England of Owen's day abounded with sects and factions, all of whom claimed some measure of authority from scripture for their various interpretations.[27] Some of these groups were orthodox, but many were not. Owen wanted pastors and churches to be able to discern the difference between truth and error while at the same time avoiding a harsh national policy on doctrine that could eventually be used against the faithful as well.[28] The various unorthodox groups that sought to make inroads in Britain rarely heralded their most significant distinctions from English Protestantism. Rather their approaches were generally more subtle, and thus more feared. After the Restoration, nonconformists such as Owen had no national political influence to keep doctrine within a certain defined system, so it was up to ministers to instruct their congregations and congregations to check the preaching of their ministers. While certain doctrinal standards did exist (for example the Congregationalists and Baptists both revised the Westminster Confession of Faith for their

[25] See Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm 130,* 6.612-614. He emphasises that it is often through regular dependence upon the means of grace experienced through the church that believers are convicted of their sin. "Sometimes in reading of the word God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart, and shakes him as to his present condition. More frequently in the hearing of the word preached, his great ordinance for conviction, conversion, and edification, doth he meet with men. God often hews men by the sword of his word in that ordinance, strikes directly in their bosom-beloved lust, startles the sinner, makes him engage unto the mortification and relinquishment of the evil of his heart." Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6.49.
[26] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished,* 13.40-32; The *True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.15, 65.
[27] Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution,* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 7, 14-19.
[28] Moore, "Reformed theology and puritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology,* 212-213.

own purposes), churches could quickly slide into heresy with little to no way for an outside group to stop the process.[29]

Puritan ministers wanted their congregations to trust the pastoral leadership of scripture-centred pastors, but they also wanted congregations to be able to demonstrate faith pre-eminently in the scriptures themselves.[30] These duties required church members to be both believing and acting in unity with scripture and one another. Pastors were to preach truth, and their lives were to be exemplary so that their congregations could follow them. Congregants were to evaluate the pastor's life to see if it accurately reflected the doctrine he preached and the same lifestyle Jesus taught. The pastor was to be an example; the people were to check that example against scripture.[31]

When it comes to emphasising the church as a body, Owen writes extensively on how Christians in a congregation are to relate to one another. His earlier work, *Eshcol*, listed a number of rules which were "to be observed by those who walk in fellowship, and considered, to stir up their remembrance in things of mutual duty one towards another."[32] As one reads these fifteen rules, one is struck by Owen's emphasis on mutual love and unity in a congregation. Owen was greatly concerned that a church profess faith in Christ by its actions as well as by its doctrine. The first of Owen's rules for churches was that they were to be characterised by "Affectionate, sincere love in all things, without dissimulation towards one another, like that which Christ bare to his church."[33]

This affection was to be shown in the way a church cared for the poor and needy among the congregation. Owen devoted an entire chapter to the explanation of how the office of deacon was instituted in the early church for just this purpose. The church members were

[29] Owen's own church was an example of this, as in the next century it eventually developed into a modified form of Arianism. See Gribben, *John Owen*, 272.
[30] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished,* 13.41.
[31] Ibid. 40-41; Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.56-58
[32] Ibid. 62.
[33] Ibid.

also to interact with one another with kindness and great patience, regardless of their social class or background. Even the language used in "conversion narratives" had a levelling influence upon a congregation and was tremendously helpful in urging community upon the varied membership of a congregation; whether rich or poor, all had come to Christ through the same means.[34] Carl Trueman has noted that Owen, one of the leading divines in England in the mid-seventeenth century, was highly unlikely to have had many others in his congregation of the same academic calibre as himself.[35] Despite this social gap, Owen's own practice gives illustration that he believed in the equality of all Christians in their interactions in the church, as his instructions remind congregations that they are to "bear with each other's infirmities, weakness, tenderness, failings, in meekness, patience, pity, and with assistance."[36] This bearing with each other extends even to identifying with each other's sufferings and personally involving oneself in others' lives insofar as such involvement is useful and beneficial. Completely absent from this work is any notion of the autonomy of the individual Christian from the rest of the congregation. The church is to be a body. Individual congregations are to be a mutually interdependent group of Christians who believe the same doctrine and are pursuing the same Christian way of life.[37] Right doctrine, for Owen, was to be expressed by intimate interpersonal fellowship among believers in a given congregation. Anything less indicated a serious spiritual problem in the church.

Genuine spiritual problems found in members of the congregation present yet another opportunity for the pastor to develop these ministry skills. The necessity of the pastoral disposition is particularly evidence in Owen's treatment of the topic of excommunication. This is a thorny aspect of a minister's shepherding tasks that Owen sees as requiring great

[34] Crawford Gribben, "Lay conversion and Calvinist doctrine," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism,* ed by Deryck W. Lovegrove, (London: Routledge, 2002), 44-45.
[35] Trueman, "Reformers, puritans, and evangelicals," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism,* 27-28.
[36] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.70. Owen's maintained this same emphasis in his sermons to his own congregation: "you that are young, poor, the meanest of the flock, may be as usefull as any member of the congregation whatsoever…" in Dr Williams's Library (DWL), MSS L6/2 (front half), 270.
[37] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan,* 13.72-74.

care. Though the church is a judge of a Christian's outward profession, Owen acknowledges only God can see the heart.[38] The church's judgment can never be infallible, but Owen points to the church's responsibility to make an evaluation of a person's conduct in light of a profession of faith. "To compose churches of habitual sinners, and that either as unto sins of commission or sins of omission, is not to erect temples to Christ, but chapels unto the devil."[39] A dispositional bent toward unrepentant sin, whether in the pastor or in a congregation, would weaken the church. Thus he emphasises the restorative nature of discipline. "The nature and end of this judgment or sentence [is] corrective, not vindictive, - for healing, not destruction."[40] The process must abound in patience and forbearance, ready at any moment to accept an evidence of repentance on the part of the guilty party.[41] Handling the responsibility of excommunication badly was seen as worse than not doing it at all.[42] It is not difficult to understand how Owen's understanding of the pastoral disposition applies. If a minister carries out such a task without the right ministry skills, significant damage will be done. The church will mar the representation of Christ if it does not proceed with appropriate caution.[43] The congregation must be willing to restore the one who was excommunicated if there is evidence of repentance. The offending member of the congregation will not receive any benefit from church discipline if a forgiving spirit is absent from the church.[44] To carry out excommunication merely by rote, or without the appropriate spirit, would cause tremendous damage to the church. A biblical disposition was an important prerequisite for this particularly troublesome area of local church life.

The pastoral disposition is not only a matter of the pastor's own disposition. The congregation also demonstrates a certain disposition in its relationships with other

[38] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.13.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid. 171.
[41] Ibid. 179.
[42] Ibid. 181.
[43] Ibid. 179.
[44] Ibid. 181.

congregations as well, relationships that are informed and seen as useful because of the pastor's disposition regarding outside influences. Owen's Congregationalism not only allowed for fellowship and even significant interaction between different gospel-preaching churches, it significantly encouraged such fellowship. Far from insisting that each church must be free to go its own way, Owen held that inter-congregational fellowships were biblical and necessary. His practise in pastoral ministry was a living demonstration of this commitment.[45] Though later in his life he became well known as a significant "nonconformist divine," he had already been influential as an apologist for congregationalism, even convincing Alexander Jaffray to give up Presbyterianism in favour of Independency during his involvement in Cromwell's Scottish expedition.[46] Owen valued his polity, and he sought to encourage a right understanding of congregationalism wherever he could.

Both of the pastors of Owen's final congregation, Joseph Caryl and Owen himself, had been Presbyterians for a time and this likely influenced the level of inter-congregational fellowship they both allowed and encouraged.[47] The very existence of the Savoy Conference, an extended meeting in which congregational ministers gathered to modify the Westminster Confession of Faith for the purposes of congregational churches, demonstrates that a close relationship did exist among the congregational churches. Congregational churches depended on these outside relationships for unity and spiritual encouragement, not that this fellowship was enough to dissuade some Presbyterians, particularly the English divines who had been at the Westminster Assembly, from the belief that Congregationalists were still schismatic.[48] Yet congregational churches saw themselves as having duties to one another even if no

[45] Bremer, *Congregational Communion,* 189. These fellowships extended to both sides of the Atlantic. See ibid. 233-240.
[46] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 158; Gribben, *John Owen*, 234; John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 221-222.
[47] Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 117-118.
[48] The relationship between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in mid 17th century England was exceedingly complex. See Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 67-73, 133. For more on how this complexity serves as a background to Owen studies see Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity,* 20-31, 156-157.

formal denominational relationship existed between them. In the difficult years following the Restoration this duty existed simply as a matter of survival.[49] Nonconformity was disruptive for its adherents in the troubled days after the Restoration. Fellowship was essential in order to keep from losing faith or hope amidst the trouble. But part of this duty of fellowship was also a theological belief in the inter-dependency of local churches. Of this communion Owen wrote:

> We do believe that the mutual communion of particular churches amongst themselves, in an equality of power and order, though not of gifts and usefulness, is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, after the death of the apostles, for the attaining the general end of all particular churches, which is the edification of the church catholic, in faith, love, and peace.[50]

It was essential for the well-being of the church that they have fellowship with other like-minded congregations.[51] This was a pattern of inter-congregation unity drawn from the earliest history of the church.

Despite the high value placed on congregational church governance, these inter-church relationships were seen as biblical and necessary to the church's well being because the churches in the New Testament had communication and fellowship with each other. Churches had the duty to "preserve a mutual holy communion among themselves" and "to give no offence unto one another."[52] A territorial disposition on the part of either the minister or the congregation would only foster unhealthy independence, something congregational churches were eager to avoid. The Congregational form of the practice of church membership also necessitated some measure of relationship between churches so that claims to membership in a previous church could be validated.[53] This form of polity may have made

[49] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England,* 75. See John Spurr, "Later Stuart Puritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism,* ed by John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9-103.
[50] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.185.
[51] Ibid. 184.
[52] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.529.
[53] Ibid. 529-530.

each congregation self-sustaining in its governance, but that didn't mean each church existed completely on its own. Such isolation was seen as undesirable and even unwise.[54]

For Owen, this inter-congregational fellowship stemmed from the commonality of belief shared among congregations. This was a part of the reason these churches were willing to establish a shared confession of faith. Though they believed in distinct congregations, congregations that were self-ruling rather than presbytery or bishop ruling, they did not believe they were to act or function as completely independent units. In fact, Owen strongly disagreed with isolationism within the larger church.

> No church, therefore, is so independent as that it can always and in all cases observe the duties it owes unto the Lord Christ and the church catholic, by all those powers which it is able to act in itself distinctly, without conjunction with others. And the church that confines its duty unto the acts of its own assemblies cuts itself off from the external communion of the church catholic; nor will it be safe for any man to commit the conduct of his soul to such a church.[55]

This common community between local congregations included mutual accountability for belief and practice, the common seeking and sharing of wisdom, accepting and extending the validity of the sacraments to one another, praying for one another, and participation in synods together as cases arose.[56] Doctrinal commonality extended beyond complete agreement on all points of doctrine, as Owen, a Congregationalist, even allowed a Baptist to preach in his congregation from time to time.[57] The response to Owen's death demonstrated the value his nonconformist colleagues placed on his commitment to inter-church unity and community.[58]

The consequences of unfit pastors in the congregation point to another reason Owen utilises the concept of the pastoral disposition. Owen emphasises the necessity of finding qualified leaders for the church so that God would receive glory from their work, and so that

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[54] Ibid. 528-530.
[55] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.196.
[56] Ibid. 191-208.
[57] Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 149.
[58] Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England,* 35, 46.

the flock would be properly established as well.[59] Conversely, Owen's Dutch contemporary Wilhelmus à Brakel, describes "an unqualified minister" as "the most despicable and harmful creature to be found in the world. He is a disgrace to the church, a stumbling block whereby many fall into eternal perdition, and the cause of the damnation of many souls."[60] Owen himself laments the effect of installing unfit pastors in churches:

> And the present ruin of religion, as unto its power, beauty, and glory, in all places, ariseth principally from this cause, that multitudes of those who undertake this office are neither in any measure fit for it, nor do either conscientiously attend unto or diligently perform the duties that belong unto it. It ever was and ever will be true in general, "Like priest, like people."[61]

If the leaders of churches are not able to emphasise the "power, beauty, and glory" of the church through their own ministry, then the congregation will have little hope of doing so themselves. Examples were not lacking as to how unfit ministers caused significant grief to their congregations, as the case of one town that "rejoiced in the replacement of the previous incumbent, who had been a common swearer, brawler and drunkard."[62] Unfit ministers damage the congregation and tarnish the reputation of Christ in the minds of outsiders.

Without this disposition, one is unfit for the pastoral office. Owen describes the danger of choosing one who is not fit for the work.

> That which is previous unto it is the meetness of the person for his office and work that is to be chosen. It can never be the duty of the church to call or choose an unmeet, an unqualified, an unprepared person unto this office. No pretended necessity, no outward motives, can enable or warrant it so to do; nor can it by any outward act, whatever the rule or solemnity of it be, communicate ministerial authority unto persons utterly unqualified for and incapable of the discharge of the pastoral office according to the rule of the Scripture. And this has been one great means of debasing the ministry and of almost ruining the church itself, either by the neglect of those who suppose themselves intrusted with the whole power of ordination, or by impositions on them by secular power and patrons of livings, as they are called, with the stated regulation of their proceedings herein by a defective law, whence there hath not been

[59] "That there are spiritual powers, gifts, and abilities, required unto the gospel ministry, I have at large declared in another treatise, as also what they are; and where there are none of those spiritual abilities which are necessary unto the edification of the church in the administration of gospel ordinances, as in prayer, preaching, and the like, no outward call or order can constitute any man an evangelical pastor." Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49.
[60] à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service,* 1.cxiv.
[61] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.89.
[62] Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger,* 18.

> a due regard unto the antecedent preparatory qualifications of those who are called unto the ministry.[63]

Not only is an unfit minister dangerous for a congregation, the congregation also endangers itself by allowing the continued presence of an unfit minister in its midst. This necessity of choosing capable ministers is also another motivation for Owen's adherence to the congregational form of polity. A congregation alone is then responsible for choosing its ministers rather than having ministers placed over it from an outside entity such as a bishop or denominational hierarchy.

Owen develops the consequences of unfit pastors by giving the congregational churches to whom he was writing instruction on what to do with an unfit pastor. The lack of qualification is so serious that genuine believers in a congregation must either remove the ill-disposed pastor from the spiritual oversight of the congregation, or, if they are unable to do so, they must remove themselves from that congregation and find one where the pastors are actually qualified for the work of the ministry.[64] Speaking of congregations led by unfit pastors, Owen writes, "it is the highest folly to imagine that any disciple of Christ can be or is obliged, by his authority, to abide in the communion of such churches, without seeking relief in the ways of his appointment, wherein that end is utterly overthrown."[65] For a pastor to take the pastoral office without the appropriate disposition is damaging to Christ's church, and for a congregation to consent to the leadership of an unqualified pastor subverts the "communion of such churches." Unqualified pastors lead, ultimately, to the destruction of the flock.

> And herein also his example ought to lie continually before the eyes of them who are called unto the pastoral office. Their entrance should be accompanied with love to the souls of men; and if the discharge of their office be not animated with love unto their flocks, wolves, or hirelings, or thieves, they may be, but shepherds they are not. Neither is the glory of the gospel ministry more lost or defaced in any thing, or by any

[63] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.54.
[64] Ibid. 91-92. This was often a difficult process, however. "A contemporary pamphlet complained that it was 'a great failing, that all the Neighbourhood almost will agree to tell the story of such a Minister's miscarriages and sins to one another…but few or none have the courage or faithfulness to report it to such as may and would remedy it'." Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger,* 23.
[65] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.92.

> means, than by the evidence that is given among the most of an inconformity unto Jesus Christ in their love unto the flock. Alas! it is scarce once thought of amongst the most of them who, in various degrees, take upon them the pastoral office. Where are the fruits of it? what evidence is given of it in any kind? It is well if some, instead of laying down their lives for them, do not by innumerable ways destroy their souls.[66]

Pastors who do not have the necessary capacities for ministry can wreak havoc in a church, and whether they do so from malice or incompetence is irrelevant. The result is the same: the flock of Christ's sheep is scattered and bruised. Owen's congregationalism is intended to be a protection for the flock against pastors who lack the appropriate disposition for pastoral ministry, but it also gives those interested in the pastorate something by which to judge their own qualifications and fitness for pastoral ministry. Ironically, Owen's requirement of the pastoral disposition is more likely to scare away the self-aware and possibly qualified than it is the obviously unqualified and oblivious, for such self-knowledge brings an awareness of one's own failures and ineptitude. But then that is where Owen's emphasis on the congregation recognising and even instigating the process of pursuing potential pastors within their midst has significant benefits. The congregational vetting of one whom they knew offers significant safeguards against both allowing unqualified pastors in and keeping qualified pastors out. The pastoral disposition provides a useful analytical tool to help both pastors and churches evaluate their suitability for pastoral ministry.

**Disposition and Sanctification**

Pastoral ministry requires more than an ability to complete certain tasks. A right disposition for ministry is also needed. This mindset must ultimately come from God; it is not something one can merely acquire for oneself. Once a pastor has sought and received this disposition from God, what then is to be done with this right disposition? A congregation may recognise a minister's particular suitability for ministry, but what is the pastor to do

[66] Ibid. 50.

from there? Owen's answer is simple: the pastoral disposition is to be improved. Any enablement must honed and polished, especially those God gives for the benefit of his church. "Christ gives none of his talents to be bound up in napkins, but expects his own with increase."[67] Dispositions can be strengthened and grown. Because this disposition is a key concept in Owen's theology of sanctification, pastors are also to see their growth in the practice of pastoral ministry as intimately connected with their own spiritual growth in holiness, not only as individuals but also as pastors. This sanctification is to proceed through their whole of their being as they fight vice and pursue virtue in their pastoral ministry. In Owen's theology, a rightly ordered pastoral disposition will also encourage the pastor to utilise the congregation for help in this process of regeneration within the church.[68]

Owen's primary emphasis on the pastoral disposition in his pastoral theology is the importance of these dispositions being improved and strengthened. The pastoral disposition, in Owen's thought, is not a static and unchangeable gift.[69] Nor does the Holy Spirit immediately grant the pastoral disposition as a complete and entire set of skills to one who desires the pastoral office. Rather, Owen speaks of the necessity of developing the pastoral disposition over time.

> [T]he proper ways whereby pastors and teachers must obtain this skill and understanding are, by diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, and temptations in their own souls, with a prudent observation of the manner of God's dealing with others, and the ways of the opposition made to the work of his grace in them. Without these things, all pretences unto this ability and duty of the pastoral office are vain; whence it is that the whole work of it is much neglected.[70]

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[67] Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, 13.44.

[68] Such a focus may also help address pastors' feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction within their own congregations that Tidball describes in *Skilful Shepherds*, 315-316.

[69] Owen's concept of the pastoral disposition is distinctly different from the Roman Catholic conception of the "indelible character" imprinted upon a priest at ordination. While he differs from Rome in that pastoral ministry is not something permanent, he also wants to guard against the idea that pastors stop being pastors as soon as they leave their own pulpits. See Owen, *Sermons*, 9.461-462; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.84-85. See also canon 9, "on the sacraments in general," of session 6 and canon 3, "on the sacrament of order" of session 23 of the Council of Trent, and sections 1121 and 1581-1584 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

[70] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.86.

This description points out that pastors must continually work to develop their disposition through the work of the skills required for their ministry tasks. Owen's language indicates regular effort must be expended in pursuit of a certain goal. "Skill," "diligence," "fervent," and "experience" are all terms of regular doing, a sort of doing that requires strenuous labour. The pastoral disposition requires improvement and regular practice. Owen discusses the risk of vanity or futility in pastoral ministry if deliberate effort is not made in the work of pastoral care, even warning that if their needs are not cared for well, the congregation will be "quickly turned out of the way."[71] The pastoral disposition needs to be continually improved if it is to be useful for both the minister and the congregation.[72]

How does this happen? How is a pastor to improve the skills necessary for pastoral ministry? Owen's answer is that a pastor needs to consistently make use of the disposition if it is to be maintained. Improvement flows, at least in part, from faithful use. Dependence upon the Holy Spirit through prayer faithful study of the scripture is also key.

> The work of rule, as distinct from teaching, is in general to watch over the walking or conversation of the members of the church with authority, exhorting, comforting, admonishing, reproving, encouraging, directing of them, as occasion shall require. The gifts necessary hereunto are diligence, wisdom, courage, and gravity; as we shall see afterward…. Hereunto spiritual wisdom, knowledge, sound judgment, experience, and utterance, are required, *all to be improved by continual study of the word and prayer*.[73]

Pastors are also to diligently work for the furthering of their skills in pastoral ministry. The abilities that Owen connects with a right use of the pastoral disposition necessitate development.

Many careers today emphasise the need for continuing education. Present day employers look for employees who are continually sharpening and developing their skills, often providing incentives for employees to attend courses and conferences related to their

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[71] Ibid. 87. On the concern over the "popular perception that the minister was neglecting his duty of pastoral care" see Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger,* 111.
[72] Owen repeatedly stresses the need for "much patience, meekness, and condescension," as well as "the exercise of humility, patience, self-denial, and spiritual wisdom." *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.87.
[73] Ibid. 109-110 (emphasis mine).

specific responsibilities. Owen, as well, argues that pastors must continually develop their pastoral abilities. Derek Tidball describes this as "Spiritual development," and he points out that it "is not primarily defined in terms of personal or emotional development… It is about the spiritual core of our being."[74] This improvement or development is needed across the whole range of pastoral responsibilities, throughout the minister's whole soul. A pastor's studies must be kept up so that the same sermonic material is not merely repeated year after year, thus boring the congregation and draining their attention. A pastor's life and being must be kept up as well. Owen reminds his readers, "A pastor's life should be vocal; sermons must be practised as well as preached."[75] For pastors, their sanctification is a matter of their pastoral practice as well as their individual growth; the two are intimately connected.

By using the category of an infused disposition, or a habit of grace, for his theology of sanctification, Owen is pointing his readers back to God as the source of the essential ability to progress in holiness. But by using the language of disposition in his pastoral theology, Owen is also making abundantly clear to pastors that they must be sanctified in their pastoral practice. He uses unmistakably dispositional terminology to explain what it is that suits or fits pastors for their pastoral responsibilities.[76] And Owen's use of this concept here in his specifically pastoral works should point his readers to his previous explanation of this terminology in his development of the doctrine of sanctification. How does Owen describe the infused disposition?

> This is that which I intend by this habit of grace,—a new gracious, spiritual life, or principle, created, and bestowed on the soul, whereby it is changed in all its faculties and affections fitted and enabled to go forth in the way of obedience unto every divine object that is proposed unto it, according to the mind of God.[77]

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[74] Derek Tidball, "The Bible in evangelical Spirituality," in *The Bible and Pastoral Practice*, ed by Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 261-262.
[75] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.57.
[76] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.49.
[77] Owen, *On Communion with God*, 2.200. "For our part, we contend that [believers] have an infused habit of grace, and that wrought with a mighty impression upon their minds and hearts; faith being of the operation of God, wrought by the exceeding greatness of his power, as he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead." Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11.191.

Having already laid the foundation for the idea of God-infused dispositions, Owen now emphasises that pastors have been given this same sort of disposition for their pastoral responsibilities. God gives the mindset and character needed for pastoral ministry to the pastor as a "gracious, spiritual life, or principle" which the pastor is then responsible, in cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit, to increase and strengthen.

In Owen's practical theology, pastors are to improve their dispositions so that they will be useful for the flock. God disposes pastors for the needs of the congregation; God makes pastors fit for service in the church.[78] But by infusing this disposition in pastors, God expects that those who serve the church will grow in their pastoral abilities as in any other category of sanctification.

> The not using of such gifts, in an orderly way, according to the rule and custom of the churches, is to napkin up the talent given to trade and profit withal. That every man ought to labour that he may walk and dwell in knowledge in his family, none doubts. That we should also labour to do so in the church or family of God is no less apparent.[79]

For a pastor to grow in sanctification necessitates seeing the tasks and character of pastoral ministry as also requiring sanctification. In Owen's practical theology, growth in holiness is not a merely individual matter of one's personal walk with God. For pastors, this growth is a matter of inescapably horizontal and relational holiness as well. This is why God fits pastors for their responsibilities: "There is, indeed, no more required of any man than God giveth him ability for."[80] The pastor's sanctification is demonstrated through the relationship with the congregation. The tasks of preaching, administering the sacraments, and discipline all require that the pastor be regularly and continually growing in sanctification in the very office of

[78] "These are those spiritual endowments which the Lord Christ grants and the Holy Spirit works in the minds of men, for this very end that the church may be profited by them." Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.55.
[79] Owen, *The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished,* 13.70. This is one of only a couple references to the improvement of pastoral gifts in Owen's earlier pastoral writings.
[80] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.75.

pastoral ministry. This is the reason Christ has given gifts to pastors, to enable them to steward their responsibilities for their congregations well.

The pastoral disposition requires the same care and effort as any other learned skill. This improvement requires the same sort of exertion as does the process of sanctification. Owen urges pastors to grow in prudence and diligence; pastors are to see their growth in pastoral ministry as an extension of their progression in sanctification.[81] As they use their virtues, they will be strengthened in them. Faith is "exercised in an especial manner; which is the only ordinary means of its growth and increase. Habits, both acquired and infused, are increased and strengthened by frequent acts on suitable objects."[82] So by using the language of disposition, Owen calls ministers to remember that they also, believers, "increase" and "strengthen" the "graces" God has infused in them.[83] In other words, ministers are to be sanctified not just in their personal character as individual Christians, but in the disposition that results in their practice of corporate pastoral ministry as well. It is necessary that pastors pay close attention

> Unto the success of the word, unto all the blessed ends of it, among them. These are no less than the *improvement and strengthening of all their graces*, the direction of all their duties, their edification in faith and love, with the entire conduct of their souls in the life of God, unto the enjoyment of him.[84]

To fail to do so shows, in Owen's estimation, that a pastor is not a true shepherd.[85]

This point is a good complement to Owen's view that any good disposition must come as the gift of God. Owen deals with both sides of the same coin. Ministers are to seek for a right disposition from God and depend entirely upon him for it. Yet they are also to

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[81] Ibid. 76. He writes of churches that "if those that instruct them, or should do so, have not some degree of eminency herein, they cannot be useful to lead them on to perfection. And the little care hereof or concernment herein is that which in our days hath rendered the ministry of many fruitless and useless." Ibid.
[82] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,* 15.461.
[83] Owen, *Pneumatologia,* 3.388.
[84] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.78 (emphasis mine).
[85] "From hence may any man take the best measure of the discharge of his duty towards his flock. He that doth constantly, diligently, fervently, pray for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity in the discharge of all other pastoral duties, nor can he voluntarily omit or neglect any of them. And as for those who are negligent herein, be their pains, labour, and travail in other duties never so great, they may be influenced from other reasons, and so give no evidence of sincerity in the discharge of their office." Ibid. 77-78.

conscientiously work for the further development of that disposition.[86] The disposition takes work to attain and constant effort to maintain.[87] God gives the disposition and empowers its ongoing use through the Holy Spirit's regenerating work, but believers are also held responsible for how they make use of this disposition. Everything in Owen's description points to continual effort. So does a believer's fight against sin and pursuit of holiness. A disposition requires constant development.[88] Pastoral ministry requires the furthering of divinely infused capacities.[89]

Owen's development of the concept of disposition within the framework of his doctrine of sanctification is highly relevant to the discussion of his pastoral theology. Disposition, in Owen's theology, is a category that is inextricably related to growth in holiness. They cannot be separated in Owen's thought. Disposition and sanctification belong together. In this respect, sanctification is as much a matter of focusing on what one is to pursue as it is focused on what one is to avoid. There is a both a positive and a negative dimension to sanctification. The Holy Spirit's regenerating work in believers involves both striving towards virtue and fighting against vice through the whole triad of mind, will, and

[86] "It hence also follows that those *who are called unto rule in the church of Christ* should diligently endeavour the attaining of and increasing in this wisdom, giving evidence thereof on all occasions, that the church may safely acquiesce in their rule." Ibid. 41-42.
[87] "It is evident what learning, labour, study, pains, ability, and exercise of the rational faculties, are ordinarily required unto the right discharge of these duties; and where men may be useful to the church in other things, but are defective in these, it becomes them to walk and act both circumspectly and humbly, frequently desiring and adhering unto the advices of them whom God hath intrusted with more talents and greater abilities." Ibid. 83.
[88] Owen instructs pastors to consistently seek improvement in the areas they are weak: "the proper ways whereby pastors and teachers must obtain this skill and understanding are, by diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, and temptations in their own souls, with a prudent observation of the manner of God's dealing with others, and the ways of the opposition made to the work of his grace in them." Ibid. 86.
[89] "With respect unto the doctrine of the gospel, there is required unto the ministry of the church skill to divide the word aright; which is also a peculiar gift of the Holy Ghost… If a minister would be accepted with God in his work, if he would be found at the last day 'a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,'—that is, such a builder of the house of God as whose work is meet, proper, and useful,—he must take care to 'divide the word of truth,' which is committed unto his dispensation, 'rightly,' or in a due manner. Ministers are stewards in the house of God, and dispensers of the mysteries thereof; and therefore it is required of them that they give unto all the servants that are in the house, or do belong unto it, a meet portion, according unto their wants, occasions, and services, suitable unto the will and wisdom of their Lord and Master." Owen, *On the Holy Spirit and His Work, as a Comforter and as the Author of Spiritual Gifts,* 4.510.

affections.[90] Owen's use of the concept of disposition in his pastoral theology means that pastors need to see their thinking, choosing, and feeling in pastoral responsibilities and situations as a matter of sanctification. How does he emphasise this?

Owen admits his work of pastoral theology is not a comprehensive treatment of pastoral ministry, particularly as it relates to ministerial virtues and vices.[91] One will search his writings in vain for a traditional listing of the virtues and their usefulness in the pastorate. He does, however, deal with them in a less direct way. Owen does reference the importance of prudence and its relationship to providing pastoral counsel and the administration of the sacraments.[92] Justice is an important category when pastors consider the categories that make up reasonable grounds for leaving a church, instructions on congregations removing unqualified ministers and deacons, and biblically warranted excommunication.[93] Courage is key for the right exercise of pastoral authority, the ability to provide pastoral rebuke when needed.[94] Owen also points to diligence and fervency in pastoral ministry, emphasising the need for pastors to give dedicated attention to their pastoral duties.[95] In typical Owen fashion, he lists cluster of virtues that are necessary for pastoral ministry such as, "diligence, wisdom, courage, and gravity," "faith, love, zeal, and compassion," "holiness, love, care, compassion, and tenderness," "holiness, love, compassion, care," "humility, patience, self-denial, and spiritual wisdom," "diligence, care, and watchfulness," "diligence, skill, and wisdom," "holiness, godliness, righteousness, and honesty"[96]

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[90] Owen references this triad of faculties when he states that "The work of the ministry in prayer and preaching of the word, or labour in the word and doctrine…are ordinarily sufficient *to take up the whole man, and the utmost of their endowments* who are called unto the pastoral office in the church," in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.110 (emphasis mine).
[91] Ibid. 47.
[92] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.464; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.77; *Sermons*, 9.461.
[93] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.22, 95, 150-151, 167.
[94] Ibid. 109, 134.
[95] Ibid. 74-96.
[96] Ibid. 109, 110, 133, 135, 87; *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.497, 499, 509.

So, while Owen does not lay out a systematic treatment of pastoral virtues, he does urge the importance of certain key virtues in pastoral ministry. He emphasises in his pastoral writings as he does in his writings on sanctification that discussing virtue without connecting it to the gospel of Jesus Christ leads Christians astray.[97] Truly Christian virtue comes as a result of one's connection to Christ. This is a cause of great hope and joy for believers in their sanctification and for pastors in their pastoral practice.[98] The pastoral disposition is a central part of how pastors avoid vice and pursue virtue in their ministerial responsibilities.

The need for pastoral virtue shows that Owen also sees pastors as having vices they must learn to avoid or subdue. He states that pastors who are negligent in their responsibilities "live in open defiance of the commands of Christ."[99] Owen laments the prevalence of pastors who were "either unacquainted with their duty, or insensible of their own authority, or cold, if not negligent, in their work," and the impact this pastoral ineptitude has on congregations.[100] The care of the flock provided through preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments are consistent and regular responsibilities for pastors, and pastors who either neglect their work or carry out their work with an indifferent attitude are ill able to provide the comfort and encouragement that is needed for the right care of God's flock. Owen emphasises that pastors have been given divinely enabled gifts precisely for the fulfilment of these ministerial tasks. Negligence not only harms the flock; it also fails to make use of divine assistance. The danger of ignorance among pastors, either of the pastor's duty or of the teaching of scripture, prompts Owen to point to the need for continual study and love of the scriptures.[101] The necessity of pastors being an example in their conduct serves as a caution against living inconsistently with that which pastors both profess and urge

[97] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.369.
[98] "All grace and privilege, all mercy, pardon, every thing else we enjoy in this world, and hope for in another, depends upon this, of relation unto Jesus Christ; therefore, certainly it is matter of joy and rejoicing to believers." Ibid. 466
[99] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.75; see also 77-78,
[100] Ibid. 142.
[101] Ibid. 82, 110.

upon their congregations.[102] "If a man teach uprightly and walk crookedly, more will fall down in the night of his life than he built in the day of his doctrine."[103] Ambition and pride also form dangerous temptations for pastors.[104] Owen connects pride with one of the key reasons the church came to require a reformation. As those who were meant to shepherd God's flock gained wealth and influence through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, so the need to provide pastoral care was supplanted by a focus on accumulating material possessions and acclaim. Church leaders are to guard against "decays in faith, love, and order" within the church, for without pastoral vigilance churches can easily be plunged into division and ruin."[105]

In his writings on pastoral sanctification Owen also points to the usefulness of the theological virtues. Right faith is as much a prerequisite for pastoral ministry in Owen's theology as it is for church membership.[106] "Whereas the especial end of the ministry is to promote and further faith and holiness in the church by the edification of it," Owen comments, "how unreasonable a thing would it be if men should be admitted unto the work of it who in their own persons were strangers both unto faith and holiness!"[107] Owen sees faith as being the source of the compassion that ministers are to show to their flock.[108] Faith also points to faithfulness; a life-long fidelity to the Christian faith once received and the responsibilities of care for Christ's flock must be maintained. It will not simply continue automatically.

Owen says comparatively little to connect hope specifically to pastoral ministry, but what he does say is significant. Both pastors and congregations are sharers in the same

[102] Ibid. 88-89.
[103] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan,* 13.57.
[104] See Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.43, 88-89.
[105] Ibid. 139.
[106] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of* God, 15.479-480, 494; The *True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.26, 54-55.
[107] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,*15.494.
[108] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.87.

eternal hope.[109] There is not one hope for the one ministering and a different hope for those being ministered to. But Owen points to the necessity of hope in connection with sanctification.[110] He also points to the continual need for pastors to have a hopeful spirit which remembers the "patience and forbearance of Christ towards his church" when dealing with members of the church caught in persistent sin.[111] As pastoral work involves pastors being instruments through which God ministers to the flock and aids them the hearts and lives of those undergoing the Spirit-empowered progression of regeneration, hope is clearly a key virtue for a rightly ordered pastoral disposition.

The most important virtue for the pastoral disposition is love. Improvement of the disposition of love is also essential, as trials and divisions will continually test a minister's affection for the congregation. This requires a pastor to be dependent on God through prayer.[112] The danger of controversy in a congregation is constant. It is imperative that a pastor "keep up love without dissimulation among all the members of the church; for if offences should abide unremoved, love, which is the bond of perfection, would not long continue in sincerity, which tends to the dissolution of the whole society."[113] The affections themselves are a tremendous asset to pastors in their ministry to the congregation.[114] The pastor is required to persistently improve the disposition of love if love is to remain a central part of that ministry.

In summary, Owen points to the need of the theological virtues as that through which all pastoral ministry is accomplished. Faith, hope, and love enable right care of the flock. What Owen explains of the process of sanctification in believers is also true of pastoral practice.

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[109] See Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.63, 82; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,*
[110] Owen, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin*, 6.311; *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded,* 7.321-323.
[111] Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church,* 16.179; *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.520.
[112] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.457.
[113] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.519.
[114] See John Flavel, *The Character of an Evangelical Pastor,* in *Works*, 6.572-573.

> The designation of what we do, of all our acts and dutys, unto the glory of the Lord, in these three things: renovation of our nature, restoration of a principle of obedience, and designation of our dutys to the glory of God, consists the substance of that holyness we are to treat on. This is indispensibly necessary to all professors of the Gospel if they designe any glory to god, or advantage to themselves by this profession.[115]

As God contributes instrumentally to the cultivation of personal holiness in several aspects of the believer's life, so he also does in the work of the cultivation of pastoral holiness. Preaching and prayer must be done through faith, discipline must be exercised in hope of restoration, and all pastoral care must be delivered in love. It is through the exercise of these divine virtues that the pastoral disposition is demonstrated and utilised. As pastors are called to strengthen their dispositions in their pastoral responsibilities, they are also reminded to continually rely on the Holy Spirit for gifts of faith, hope, and love. As pastors depend on God's help for the accomplishment of what he has called them to do, he uses these virtues in their lives to strengthen and direct their work in an ever-increasing fashion. The divine renovation of human nature and reworking of human duties to God's glory are on display as the Spirit's power in pastors continually enables and directs their work. Owen's emphasis on sanctification flows from a desire to help his readers better understand how they may both glorify God and better their own lives through daily progressing in the Holy Spirit's regenerating work.[116] Sanctification is not only a personal work in Owen's theology, there is a significant sanctifying component necessary for a right understanding of one's pastoral practice as relates to the gathered congregation.

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[115] Owen, sermon manuscript L 6/2 (back half), 169.

[116] Though there are significant problems with Fesko's essay on "infused habits" among the reformed orthodox, this summary is helpful: "The main reason Owen finds the concept of an infused habit useful and even biblical is because he, like Horton, wants to highlight the divine source of sanctification. He does not want people to confuse effects for their causes or natural for God-given abilities: habits versus actions, infused principles versus naturally acquired habits, spiritual versus merely moral, or grace versus fallen human nature (Owen 1674, 415). For Owen and the Reformed Orthodox, the concept of infused habits provides the metaphysical architecture to delineate fallen ability from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. This framework provides the necessary distinctions for two important functions regarding the doctrine of sanctification: (1) to delineate between natural and supernatural abilities; and (2) to provide a conceptual context for a theology of virtue." J.V. Fesko, "Aquinas's Doctrine of Justification and Infused Habits in Reformed Soteriology," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants,* ed by Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 259-260.

Pastoral ministry in the mid-seventeenth century was often a good job. Clergy received certain benefits that ordinary day labourers would never enjoy. University education, if one could afford it, often brought with it certain benefits. Those with education could afford a life outside of manual labour. Owen himself could afford to employ servants for daily household tasks throughout most of his adult life. Academic training gave one the opportunity of political and social advancement. Even if pastoral ministry was not always a financially reliable job in Owen's time, it was a lifestyle significantly less dependent upon the changes of seasons and weather than were those involved in agriculture and day labouring.[117]

Yet Owen's emphasis on pastoral ministry was not merely study and academic achievement. Rather he exhorts other ministers to make the effort needed to grow in their ministerial responsibilities with their congregants. In other words, in Owen's explanation of the pastoral disposition, pastors need their congregations for their own spiritual growth. Even if Owen didn't always excel at this himself, as at certain times it seems he was rather frustrated with his early congregations, he certainly worked to point out to others that pastors were to improve their ministry skills instead of sitting back and enjoying the fruit of a ministerial life.[118] Ministry skills were to be developed. This requires patience, as dispositional growth takes time. "The pastoral *habitus* is not merely a science mastered by the study of theology, but an art refined in the school of experience," as Senkbeil writes in his pastoral theology.[119] "Since Christ Jesus alone is our life, the art of pastoral care always involves the deliberate and discerning application of both his holiness and his righteousness not as mere categorical ideas, but blessed realities. You don't gain that level of skill

[117] For a discussion of the financial state of many parish clergy in the period immediately preceding Owen's pastorate, see Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church,* (London: Panther, 1971), 199-223. The practical aspects of this difficulty can be seen in the lives of some of Owen's close contemporaries. See Gribben, *John Owen,* 70.
[118] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms,* 1.465; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.47, 74-76; Gribben, *John Owen*, 54-56.
[119] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 56.

overnight."[120] Owen would agree. A pastoral disposition must be patiently improved as well as diligently acquired.

This is where the Puritans excelled at practical pastoral counsel. They were entrenched in the daily needs of their often very average congregations. It is not surprising that so much of their works was taken up with providing pastoral counsel. Consider Richard Baxter, a contemporary of Owen, and his pastoral practice and massive *Christian Directory*. The sheer breadth of the topics Baxter addresses bears witness to the enormous amount of time such a work would have taken to prepare. Yet it also evidences a distinctive care for how Baxter sought to encourage Christian transformation in the lives of those within his ministry context.[121] Consider the large collected works that many Puritans established during their lifetimes. Many of these works were written during times of great material hardship because of their commitment to certain unpopular principles within the Church of England. These pastors wrote expansively because they were dedicated to applying their preaching expansively across the multifaceted lives of their parishioners. Owen took his first pastoral charge and immediately started writing works on how local pastors and congregations were to relate to one another. After the Restoration wrought such havoc across the non-conformist scene in England, Owen was still writing pastoral manuals for independent churches and congregations. Even in dangerous times he was seeking to develop his ability to mentor other pastors and help develop other congregations.[122] Owen was honing his own pastoral disposition even amidst the wreckage of the Acts of Uniformity.

The difficulty Owen and other Puritan pastors continually faced after the collapse of the Commonwealth only serves to underscore Owen's insistence that developing one's

[120] Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 56.
[121] For a brief summary of Richard Baxter's work in Kidderminster see Bernard Capp, *England's Culture Wars,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 221-223. Pete Ward connects the goal of practical theology as a discipline with such transformation in *Introducing Practical Theology*, 167.
[122] Gribben, *John Owen,* 240.

disposition takes "earnest striving and contending."[123] These were not abilities that would be developed naturally. They would not merely be acquired then mastered. The acquisition of pastoral gifts is the beginning rather than the end. The attitude of many nonconformist pastors to the sufferings they faced after the restoration demonstrates their commitment to maintaining this appropriate disposition even during great hardship.[124]

So, Owen preached, pastored, and wrote. As he aged, his writings emphasise more and more the necessity of pastors to improve their own pastoral disposition at the same time he avoids neglecting the emphasis of dependence upon the Holy Spirit to do this. In other words, Owen's later writings put a strong emphasis on self-improvement in pastoral ministry, but they do so within the context of a theology that depends entirely on God's work for the development of any grace in one's life.

**Disposition Horizontally and Vertically Purposed**

Dispositions are an inherently teleological concept. This was true in Aristotle, as human inclinations are directed towards human happiness. In Aquinas humans are inclined towards union with God. So also, in Owen, are dispositions teleologically directed inclinations. Dispositions inclined their possessors towards certain ends. While in ordinary Christian sanctification the chief end of humanity is communion with God, in Owen's writings on the pastoral disposition the *telos* is twofold: the edification of the church and the glory of God.

Edification of the believers is the penultimate reason for the gift of the pastoral disposition. Owen states that Christ gives gifts to pastors "whereby they may be enabled unto the discharge of the office of the ministry, as to the edification of the church in all the ends of

[123] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.65.
[124] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 238-243.

it."[125] This horizontal edification is one of the chief purposes of the infusion of this disposition to ministers. "[W]herever Jesus Christ calls and appoints a minister in his house, for the building work of it," Owen preached in a sermon on the work of the Holy Spirit and the divine enablement given to pastors for their work, "he gives him spiritual abilities to do that work by the Holy Ghost. He set none at work in his house, when he went away, but he gave them talents."[126] This edification is also why Christ provides different pastors or elders with different sets of gifts. Though all ministers are to have evidence of this pastoral disposition in their lives, the specific abilities they have will differ, and this is for the good of the congregation.[127] Yet despite the differences in specific abilities and skills, the point is the same: Christ gives ministers in his churches abilities for the purpose of their edifying use among the congregation. At an ordination service he preached less than a year before his death, Owen wrote,

> Christ hath instituted a beautiful order in his church… there is no way to discover it but by the harmony that there is between gifts, office, and edification. The original of all church order and rule is in gifts; the exercise of those gifts is by office; the end of all those gifts and offices is, edification.[128]

In other words, Christ has provided precisely what is necessary for effective pastoral ministry, and effective pastoral ministry leads to the edification of the flock. The very thing that makes a good pastor is what Christ gives to pastors through the pastoral disposition.

Owen's emphasis on the edifying purpose in the pastoral disposition points to the need for pastors to incline towards the congregation. This inclination stands behind what he writes on pastoral zeal and compassion.[129] Pastors, in Owen's theology, are to be inclined towards the members that make up their congregations with their minds, wills, and affections.

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[125] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.432. See also *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.40, 134; *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.493-494. Owen makes a significant emphasis on the purpose of inter-congregation fellowship also being purposed for the edification of the church, in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.183-208.
[126] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.448.
[127] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.502-504.
[128] Owen, *Sermons*, 9.453.
[129] See Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.77, 110; *Sermons*, 455-456.

This means they are to think, choose, and feel towards their people in ways that are consistent with the edification of God's flock. Owen's emphasis is as far as possible from a sort of perfunctory fulfilment of pastoral duties or a stark separation between clergy and laity. Rather, pastors are to lean in towards their people with the whole of their dispositions for their good. Owen's point here encourages a real intimacy between pastors and people, an intimacy that he demonstrated in his own congregation. Pastors are not only shepherds; they are also fellow sheep as well. How much pastoral theology today could benefit from this sort of emphasis. Instead of a pastor being a top-down sort of leader spearheading change upon an unwitting congregation, the pastor is continually seeking the good of the people with compassion and tenderness. Rather than the sour relationships that are all too prevalent between ministers and their congregations, Owen's emphasis points to pastors working with their people, being deliberately inclined towards their good. Edification is a far better goal than mere survival or change, and it informs how one goes about the difficult process of church change when it is truly needed.

Edification points to genuine affection and care for a congregation on the part of the pastor, an inclination of the affections towards God's people, rather than a spirit of dominance or superiority. Not only do pastors need to think, choose, and do rightly about and for their congregations, they also need to feel rightly towards their people. Owen understands human feelings and affections as things for which humans are, at least in part, responsible. Feelings are not merely passions, things that happen to us. They are, instead, things we are to take control of and use rightly. What we think about, what we choose, and what we want all have a role to play in how we feel. Owen's application of this emphasis to the pastoral disposition shows that pastors are to be inclined in their affections towards the needs and good of their congregation, in a penultimate sense, their edification as people of God.

But Owen's development of the pastoral disposition also has a vertical purpose to it as well. The glory of God is the ultimate purpose or end of the pastoral disposition. Owen emphasises this goal repeatedly throughout his pastoral writings.[130] As pastors grow in their abilities to shepherd God's flock, God receives glory through their work. God's glory is not an abstract goal for Owen. As his catechism points out, God receives glory through pastors providing encouragement and comfort of his people.[131] It was not as if pastors simply have to go through the correct actions and the church would automatically bring honour and glory to Christ. Their actions must be directed towards that end. The ends of an action determine the virtue of that action. Thus, even apparently successful pastoral care that is directed towards a pastor's own good or even the church's good rather than first and foremost God's glory will ultimately fail. God's glory is to be behind everything that a pastor thinks, chooses, and feels. The pastor is to incline towards this ultimate goal in the whole triad of being and through the entirety of pastoral responsibilities. The goal of the church itself is to exist for God's glory.

Owen sees God's glory as being the key motivation behind all that pastors and congregations are and do. Wealth, influence, power, and acclaim are no sign of a pastoral disposition or a properly functioning church. It is in and through a rightly ordered congregation and a pastorally disposed minister that God receives glory. Owen's emphasis on the pastoral disposition inclining towards the ultimate end of God's glory points to the importance of the church in his theology. Despite the marvels of creation and kingdoms, it is in the church where God's glory is chiefly displayed. Owen points pastors to a much larger responsibility than they are able to fulfil in and of themselves, a responsibility that reminds them of their need to continually depend upon God for strength and ability, and a responsibility that has the promise of eternal reward for such dependence.

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[130] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.57, 58, 84; *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,* 15.455, 471, 478, 486, 512, 530; *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.51, 77, 91, 132, 196.
[131] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.530.

For many in Owen's day, as is abundantly testified to amongst the writings of the Puritans, the primary motivation to improve one's own abilities is the glory of Christ. Whether in personal or pastoral sanctification, believers are to grow for the purpose of bringing honour to their Saviour. So, ministers are also called to give a good account of their pastoral charge, and one of the central driving theological principles in the reformation and post-reformation period was that all of life should be accomplished for the glory of God. Ministers who handled the responsibilities of pastoral life and work well would bring great joy to the master. The better pastors functioned as shepherds over the flock of Christ's followers, the more they could see "Christ's delight in the purity of his ordinances" in a specific congregation.[132] Ministers are to improve their skills so they could make their ministries more pleasing to their Saviour. A congregation that greater resembles its God would bring more glory to him. The final question in Owen's *Brief Instruction* makes this point explicit. "Q. 53. What are the ends of all this dispensation and order of things in the church? A. The glory of the God, the honour of Jesus Christ the mediator, the furtherance of the gospel, the edification and consolation of believers here, with their eternal salvation hereafter."[133] Here Owen shows both the ultimate and the immediate ends of the divinely infused disposition. Owen wants pastors to improve their skills as local church ministers so that God might receive greater glory. A pastor who handles the pastoral charge well brings honour to Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen the importance Owen places upon the pastoral disposition in his writings to both pastors and congregations. Ministers require a certain God-given disposition to enable them to fulfil the responsibilities of pastoral ministry. We have

[132] Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*, 13.69.
[133] Owen, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*, 15.530.

also seen that Owen saw this as an important idea to inculcate in the minds of newly appointed pastors. Ministers are called to view their responsibilities as that of shepherds, and they are also to care for their own souls so they may better care for the flock. In this Owen both teaches and exemplifies the pastoral disposition and the need for theoretico-practical theology.

Owen's development of the concept of the pastoral disposition relies heavily on his other theological developments. He draws from his insight gained from writing a commentary on the book of Hebrews to describe how ministers exemplify Christ in their pastoral practice. He connects the pastoral disposition to his broader theology of sanctification and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. His understanding of the need for a certain disposition in humanity is drawn from his anthropology and has a significant doxological focus to it as well. The pastoral disposition also shows the importance of a right understanding of ecclesiology in Owen's theological formation. Owen's pastoral disposition is a theologically holistic concept which draws from the riches of the rest of Owen's theological project.

But it is a truly catholic theological development as well. Owen borrows from the many figures in the Christian tradition throughout the centuries to bolster his proofs for the existence and importance of the pastoral disposition for God-glorifying and congregation edifying church ministry. Early church, medieval, and contemporary figures are all referenced. Owen's exploration of the topic crosses denominational divides and seeks to use the best of Christian theology regardless of where Owen might differ on other points. He uses both contemporary British and continental theologians as parts of his arguments, showing that Owen self-consciously develops this idea in the context of early modern protestant theology rather than in complete isolation.

Owen's mature pastoral theology is a demonstration of this very disposition in action. Both his church manual and ordination sermons exemplify the importance of rightly considering not only what one is to do as a pastor of a congregation but also the manner in which one does it as well. His ordination sermons were comparatively short, taking perhaps half an hour to deliver to the congregation in contrast to his earlier sermons which were much longer.[134] The language of Owen's sermons and his pastoral manual was simple and accessible for most Christians in his own day. He uses few technical terms, or least few that would be unfamiliar to his audience. His use of non-English terminology is restricted to words taken from the biblical text.[135] There are no quotations from philosophers and very limited reference to figures from church history, with which in other works Owen has shown himself to be comfortable. But as these were works and services produced for gathered congregations, Owen limits himself to that which is edifying for his immediate audience. He has already proven his ability as a theologian in other works. His commentaries show his talent as an exegete and a linguist. Yet here, preaching and writing to congregations and ministers, Owen concerns himself with the immediate spiritual needs of both the pastor and people to whom he is preaching.

This emphasis on sanctification in Owen's discussion of the pastoral disposition points to development in Owen's thought. His early biographers portray him as a young man who studied as if all knowledge and application depended solely upon his mastery of the subjects.[136] Though there is almost certainly a significant hagiographic element to this depiction, it is likely Owen devoted a significant amount of effort to his academic priorities. His first few published writings betray an attempt to forcibly push his way in the public

[134] See Owen, *Sermons*, 9.431-462. Though some of Owen's earlier sermons could stretch well beyond an hour in length, as he aged, they tended to become shorter. By the time of his death, many of his sermons and addresses are half an hour or less in length.
[135] Owen's use of Greek and Latin in these sermons seems to be restricted to an explanation of the meaning of the text of scripture. See ibid. 454. Owen does use Greek and Latin in his church manual, but he also provides the translation in the text of the work. See *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, 16.55-70.
[136] Thomson, *The Life of Dr. Owen,* in *Works*, 1.xxiii-xxiv; Toon, *God's Statesman,* 4-6; Gribben, *John Owen*, 34.

theological spotlight, as if he could become a profound and respected theologian by sheer force of will.[137] Interestingly enough, it is in Owen's earliest pastoral theology where he demonstrates the most significant emphasis upon the minister depending upon God for the right abilities for pastoral ministry.[138] His later writings, however, make much more of an emphasis on pastors improving the pastoral disposition themselves, rather than simply relying upon God to provide it. It is also noteworthy that the clearest dispositional language comes out in Owen's later publications on the church. Even Owen's discussion of the gifts required for pastoral ministry increases greatly in Owen's later writings on the church.[139] Perhaps Owen himself experienced the progression of sanctification in his own mental development of the concept of the pastoral disposition.

Owen's understanding of the pastoral disposition offers practical "how-to" advice for the ministers of his day and our own day. He teaches that the disposition is a matter of character and personal inclination rather than merely a list of tasks to accomplish and requirements to fulfil. Owen expands on the specific skills necessary for pastoral ministry, but he insists that they be essentially tied to this pastoral disposition.

He, in continuity with previous theologians of the reformed scholastic stream and medieval Christianity, shows that this disposition is something that only God can provide. Yet, in continuity with the reformed understanding of sanctification, also emphasises that the minister must seek this disposition from God. Owen repeatedly writes on the necessity of

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[137] Gribben, *John Owen*, 39, 44-54.

[138] His *Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* has a discussion on the gifts required for pastoral ministry, but there is very little in the work on improvement of the pastoral disposition. It is almost as if Owen, at this early point in his ministry, thought one either had or did not have the pastoral disposition. Growing or strengthening the disposition does not come into the discussion in this work. Nor does it in Owen's shortly thereafter published treatment on the church, *Eshcol; a Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan*. Again, while Owen gives many useful descriptions of both the tasks and the spiritual responsibilities of pastoral ministry, there is very little emphasis on the pastor's necessity of strengthening pastoral virtue. The work, while addressing what giftings pastors need in order to serve their congregations, reads very much like book written by a pastor to a church on how the church needs to respond to the pastor. And perhaps that was what it was. Puritan pastors believed it was their responsibility to direct the congregation. See Joanne Jung, *Godly Conversation*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 13-16 for more on the way puritan pastors expected congregations to interact with their preaching and instruction.

[139] Compare chapter 7 alone of *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* with either *The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished* or *Eshcol*.

pastors to improve and strengthen their own pastoral dispositions. The skills they have acquired for pastoral ministry must be constantly honed and sharpened. The pastoral disposition is given for the purpose of being enhanced once received. Pastors are to develop their skills for the bettering of their ministry to their congregations.

He also places the ultimate location for the use of the pastoral disposition in the local church. Pastors are to be shepherds, and the ideal location for the practise of practical shepherding is in the context of the church. Owen's Congregationalism provides an opportunity for him to emphasise the necessity of this disposition for the protection of both the church and the pastor. Pastors are to serve local congregations, but this does not mean that they are only involved in their own churches. Owen's form of Congregationalism is not strict independency. Rather, Owen shows the necessity of churches interacting with one another and leaning upon one another for help in times of need. His understanding of the pastoral disposition leads to pastors and churches being interdependent rather than completely independent.

The pastoral disposition is infused in ministers for a twofold purpose: the edification of the body and the glory of God. This approach shows that ministers need both a horizontal and a vertical focus. They must be looking at their congregations as well as looking at God. The pastoral disposition results in a better capacity to minister to one's flock, and through that ministry Christ's under-shepherds are better able to honour their Chief Shepherd. This dual purpose in the pastoral disposition keeps ministers focused on the reasons for which the disposition is given in the first place, to bring glory to God through the right care of his people.

Owen's understanding of the pastoral disposition shows that he firmly relies upon the work of Christian theological scholarship from the previous generations of pastoral ministry. In his application of this idea to his written practical theology, Owen shows competence as a

synthesiser of theological ideas. He knows how to apply scholastic concepts to practical ministry. In this, perhaps a retrieval of Owen's practical theology will produce useful fruit in the pastoral ministry of today's world as well.

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