

## THE LIFE AND THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

Reformed Theological Seminary

Fall Semester 2022

By any canon of assessment, John Owen ranks as the greatest theologian among the divines of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and as one of the greatest (some would argue *the* greatest) of English theologians since the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Owen lived through one of the most dramatic periods of English national and ecclesiastical history. He came to maturity during the rise of Puritan influence, lived through the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I, and the period of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell. He rose to prominence in academia and influence among the leading figures of the nation, but after the Protectorate's collapse and the restoration of the monarchy shared in the long period of ecclesiastical exile precipitated by the Great Ejection of 1662, and then, before finally exercising a limited pastoral ministry to a relatively small congregation of gathered saints in London.

Owen left behind, in various forms, materials that have filled twenty-four large and densely packed volumes, and although he never wrote a technical systematic theology, his works covers a wide range of important topics.

In this course our focus will be on Owen's doctrinal and pastoral writings, and following an introduction to his life, times, and ministry, the lectures will focus on a number of themes ranging including reflections on his doctrine of Scripture, his understanding of covenant theology, aspects of his doctrine of the Trinity and the accomplishment of salvation in Christ, and its application by the Spirit in the life of the believer. Attention will be given also to his understanding of the ministry of the word and the sacraments.

### Class Meetings

The class is scheduled to meet at the following times:

Thursday 29th September	9.00am-4.00pm
Friday 30 <sup>th</sup> September	9.00am-4.00pm
Monday 10 <sup>th</sup> October	9.00am-2.30pm
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup> October	9.00am-2.30pm
Wednesday 12 October	9.00am-12.00pm Exam

### Exam

An *Exam* will be held on the morning of Wednesday 12 October between 9.00am to 12.00 am. This will be a very straightforward exam and take the form of a series of brief essay questions based on the materials presented in class.

### Reading:

An ever increasing amount of research and publication on Owen has become available in Owen studies in the past few decades. Class members will find access to a vast amount of bibliographical and other material on the website [Johnowen.org](http://Johnowen.org)

**Required Readings:**

Given the exigencies of a brief modular class, and the fact that Owen is often regarded as a difficult author to read, the reading requirements are limited to the following selections. These amount to only some 400 pages in the Gould edition of the *Works*. Since he has had a reputation for being difficult to read, and students new to reading him will find that he is best read at a slower pace than usual until his style (which is heavily Latinate) becomes more familiar. Reading him “out loud” is helpful for some.

***The following readings should be completed by the end of the semester:***

1. *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. *Works*, 6, 1-86
2. *An Exposition upon Psalm 130 (verse 4 only)*, *Works*, 6, 379-606

***Also the following selection providing examples of Owen’s ministry in various contexts:***

3. “*Christ’s Kingdom and the Magistrate’s Power*”—a sermon in *Works*, 8, 367-395
4. “*Gospel Charity*”—a sermon preached at the union of Owen’s London congregation with the congregation formerly pastored by Dr Joseph Caryl. *Works* 9, 257-271
5. Short Discourses at Church Meetings, Discourses I-XII. *Works* 9, 358-401.

**Students should report that they have completed the readings before the end of the semester by submitting**

A two page report on each of items 1, 2, and 5

A one page report on each of items 3 and 4

The readings and reports will constitute 50% of the Grade.

**NB All work should be emailed to [Sinclairbferguson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Sinclairbferguson@yahoo.co.uk)**