

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

Reformed Theological Seminary—Dallas Campus

Fall Semester 2025

By any canon of assessment, John Owen ranks as the greatest theologian among the divines of the 17th 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 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. In addition attention will be given also to his understanding of the ministry of the word and the sacraments.

Class Meetings

9,10, 11, 13 October 2025. Specific hours will be posted nearer the time.

General Reading:

An ever increasing amount of research and publication has become available in Owen studies in recent decades. The most comprehensive list of bibliographical material can be accessed at:

<https://earlymodern.web.ox.ac.uk/john-owen-learned-puritan>

Required Reading and Written Submissions:

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 have been restricted to approximately 400 pages in the Goold edition of his *Works*. Those who are 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. Some find it helpful to read him “out loud.”

The following reading should be completed by 11 October

1. *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. *Works*, 6, 1-86

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

2. *An Exposition upon Psalm 130 (verse 4 only)*, *Works*, 6, 379-606
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.

The following written submissions are required based on these readings:

- 1: Between four and six ‘lesson’/‘talk’/‘sermon’ outlines on item 1—identifying the intended hearers (e.g. youth/students/church).
- 2: A four to five page report on each of items 2 and 5
- 3: A one to two page report on each of items 3 and 4

Reports should include a brief description of the context and purpose of the work, and any critical and applicatory reflections.

Grades will be based on the fulfilment of these requirements.

Work should be emailed to Sinclairbferguson@yahoo.co.uk

Zoom Policy

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (*RTS Catalog* p. 46).

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (*RTS Catalog* p. 49).