



*The*  
COMPLETE WORKS  
*of* JOHN OWEN

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The Trinity • Volume 7

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*The Holy Spirit—The Helper*

INTRODUCED & EDITED BY

*Andrew S. Ballitch*

*The Complete Works of John Owen*

## The Complete Works of John Owen

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- Vol. 1 *Communion with God*
- Vol. 2 *The Trinity Defended: Part 1*
- Vol. 3 *The Trinity Defended: Part 2*
- Vol. 4 *The Person of Christ*
- Vol. 5 *The Holy Spirit—His Person and Work: Part 1*
- Vol. 6 *The Holy Spirit—His Person and Work: Part 2*
- Vol. 7 *The Holy Spirit—The Helper*
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### The Gospel

- Vol. 9 *The Death of Christ*
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- Vol. 11 *Justification by Faith Alone*
- Vol. 12 *The Saints' Perseverance: Part 1*
- Vol. 13 *The Saints' Perseverance: Part 2*
- Vol. 14 *Apostasy from the Gospel*

### The Christian Life

- Vol. 15 *Sin and Temptation*
- Vol. 16 *An Exposition of Psalm 130*
- Vol. 17 *Heavenly-Mindedness*
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- Vol. 21 *Sermons from the Later Restoration Years (1676–1682)*
- Vol. 22 *Miscellaneous Sermons and Lectures*

### The Church

- Vol. 23 *The Nature of the Church: Part 1*
- Vol. 24 *The Nature of the Church: Part 2*
- Vol. 25 *The Church Defended: Part 1*
- Vol. 26 *The Church Defended: Part 2*
- Vol. 27 *The Church's Worship*
- Vol. 28 *The Church, the Scriptures, and the Sacraments*

### Hebrews

- Vol. 29 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 1, Introduction to Hebrews*
- Vol. 30 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 2, Christ's Priesthood and the Sabbath*
- Vol. 31 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 3, Jesus the Messiah*
- Vol. 32 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 4, Hebrews 1–2*
- Vol. 33 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 5, Hebrews 3–4*
- Vol. 34 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 6, Hebrews 5–6*
- Vol. 35 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 7, Hebrews 7–8*
- Vol. 36 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 8, Hebrews 9–10*
- Vol. 37 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 9, Hebrews 11–13*

### Latin Works

- Vol. 38 *The Study of True Theology*

### Shorter Works

- Vol. 39 *The Shorter Works of John Owen*

### Indexes

- Vol. 40 *Indexes*

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GENERAL EDITORS

Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright

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# Volume 7

## Contents

*Works Preface* vii

Editor's Introduction 1

*The Reason of Faith* 71

*The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding  
the Mind of God* 209

General Index 351

Scripture Index 363



## *Works Preface*

JOHN OWEN (1616–1683) is one of the most significant, influential, and prolific theologians that England has ever produced. His work is of such a high caliber that it is no surprise to find it still in demand more than four centuries after his birth. As a son of the Church of England, a Puritan preacher, a statesman, a Reformed theologian and Bible commentator, and later a prominent Nonconformist and advocate of toleration, he is widely read and appreciated by Christians of different types all over the globe, not only for the profundity of his thinking but also for the depth of his spiritual insight.

Owen was born in the year that William Shakespeare died, and in terms of his public influence, he was a rising star in the 1640s and at the height of his power in the 1650s. As chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, dean of Christ Church, and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, he wielded a substantial degree of power and influence within the short-lived English republic. Yet he eventually found himself on the losing side of the epic struggles of the seventeenth century and was ousted from his position of national preeminence. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 effectively barred him from any role in the established church, yet it was in the wilderness of those turbulent post-Restoration years that he wrote many of his most momentous contributions to the world of theological literature, despite being burdened by opposition, persecution, family tragedies, and illness.

There was an abortive endeavor to publish a uniform edition of Owen's works in the early eighteenth century, but this progressed no further than a single folio volume in 1721. A century later (1826), Thomas Russell met with much more success when he produced a collection in twenty-one volumes. The appetite for Owen only grew; more than three hundred people had subscribed to the 1721 and 1826 editions of his works, but almost three thousand subscribed to the twenty-four-volume set produced by William H. Goold



from 1850 onward. That collection, with Goold's learned introductions and notes, became the standard edition. It was given a new lease on life when the Banner of Truth Trust reprinted it several times beginning in 1965, though without some of Owen's Latin works, which had appeared in Goold's edition, or his massive Hebrews commentary, which Banner did eventually reprint in 1991. Goold corrected various errors in the original seventeenth- and eighteenth-century publications, some of which Owen himself had complained of, as well as certain grammatical errors. He thoroughly revised the punctuation, numeration of points, and Scripture references in Owen and presented him in a way acceptable to nineteenth-century readers without taking liberties with the text.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, and especially since the reprinting of Goold's edition in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a great flowering of interest in seventeenth-century Puritanism and Reformed theology. The recent profusion of scholarship in this area has resulted in a huge increase of attention given to Owen and his contribution to these movements. The time has therefore come to attempt another presentation of Owen's body of work for a new century. This new edition is more than a reprint of earlier collections of Owen's writings. As useful as those have been to us and many others, they fail to meet the needs of modern readers who are often familiar with neither the theological context nor the syntax and rhetorical style of seventeenth-century English divinity.

For that reason, we have returned again to the original editions of Owen's texts to ensure the accuracy of their presentation here but have conformed the spelling to modern American standards, modernized older verb endings, reduced the use of italics where they do not clarify meaning, updated some hyphenation forms, modernized capitalization both for select terms in the text and for titles of Owen's works, refreshed the typesetting, set lengthy quotations in block format, and both checked and added Scripture references in a consistent format where necessary. Owen's quotations of others, however, including the various editions of the Bible he used or translated, are kept as they appear in his original. His marginal notes and footnotes have been clearly marked in footnotes as his (with "—Owen" appearing at the end of his content) to distinguish them from editorial comments. Foreign languages such as Greek, Hebrew, and Latin (which Owen knew and used extensively) have been translated into modern English, with the original languages retained in footnotes for scholarly reference (also followed by "—Owen"). If Goold omitted parts of the original text in his edition, we have restored them to their rightful place. Additionally, we have attempted to regularize the numbering system Owen

employed, which was often imprecise and inconsistent; our order is 1, (1), [1], {1}, and 1st. We have also included various features to aid readers' comprehension of Owen's writings, including extensive introductions and outlines by established scholars in the field today, new paragraph breaks marked by a pilcrow (¶), chapter titles and appropriate headings (either entirely new or adapted from Goold), and explanatory footnotes that define archaic or obscure words and point out scriptural and other allusions in the text. On the rare occasions when we have added words to the text for readability, we have clearly marked them using square brackets. Having a team of experts involved, along with the benefit of modern online database technology, has also enabled us to make the prodigious effort to identify sources and citations in Owen that Russell and Goold deliberately avoided or were unable to locate for their editions.

Owen did not use only one English translation of the Bible. At various times, he employed the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Authorized Version (KJV), and his own paraphrases and translations from the original languages. We have not sought to harmonize his biblical quotations to any single version. Similarly, we have left his Hebrew and Greek quotations exactly as he recorded them, including the unpointed Hebrew text. When it appears that he has misspelled the Hebrew or Greek, we have acknowledged that in a footnote with reference to either *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

This new edition presents fresh translations of Owen's works that were originally published in Latin, such as his *Θεολογούμενα Παντοδαπά* (1661) and *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (which Goold published in an amended eighteenth-century translation). It also includes certain shorter works that have never before been collected in one place, such as Owen's prefaces to other people's works and many of his letters, with an extensive index to the whole set.

Our hope and prayer in presenting this new edition of John Owen's complete works is that it will equip and enable new generations of readers to appreciate the spiritual insights he accumulated over the course of his remarkable life. Those with a merely historical interest will find here a testimony to the exceptional labors of one extraordinary figure from a tumultuous age, in a modern and usable critical edition. Those who seek to learn from Owen about the God he worshiped and served will, we trust, find even greater riches in his doctrine of salvation, his passion for evangelism and missions, his Christ-centered vision of all reality, his realistic pursuit of holiness, his belief that theology matters, his concern for right worship and religious freedom, and his careful exegetical engagement with the text of

God's word. We echo the words of the apostle Paul that Owen inscribed on the title page of his book *Χριστολογία* (1679), "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

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# THE REASON OF FAITH

or,

*An Answer unto That Inquiry,*

*“Wherefore We Believe the*

*Scripture to Be the Word of God.”*

*With the Causes and Nature of That Faith*

*Wherewith We Do So.*

*Wherein the Grounds Whereon the Holy*

*Scripture Is Believed to Be the Word of*

*God with Faith Divine and Supernatural,*

*Are Declared and Vindicated.*

By John Owen, D.D.

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*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will  
they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

LUKE 16:31

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London, Printed for Nathaniel Ponder,  
at the Peacock in the Poultry, near  
Cornhill: 1677



# *The Reason of Faith*

## Contents

- To the Reader 75
- 1 The Subject Stated: Preliminary Remarks 81
  - 2 What It Is Infallibly to Believe the Scripture to Be the Word of God, Affirmed 91
  - 3 Sundry Convincing External Arguments for Divine Revelation 97
  - 4 Moral Certainty, the Result of External Arguments, Insufficient: Four Arguments against the Sufficiency of Moral Certainty 127
  - 5 Divine Revelation Itself the Only Foundation and Reason of Faith 153
  - 6 The Nature of Divine Revelations: Their Self-Evidencing Power Considered, Particularly That of the Scriptures as the Word of God 167
  - 7 Inferences from the Whole: Some Objections Answered 187
- Appendix 197

Owen's treatise did not originally have chapter divisions. These divisions and titles have been adapted from the William Goold edition of 1862. They are fitting both with regard to the content and flow of the treatise and are stylistically consistent with the original chapter titles found in Owen's other works.



## To the Reader

HAVING ADDED a brief account of the design, order, and method of the ensuing discourse in an appendix at the close of it,<sup>1</sup> I shall not here detain the reader with the proposal of them; yet some few things remain which I judge it necessary to mind him of. Be he who he will, I am sure we shall not differ about the weight of the argument in hand; for whether it be the truth we contend for or otherwise, yet it will not be denied but that the determination of it, and the settling of the minds of men about it, are of the highest concern unto them. But whereas so much has been written of late by others on this subject, any further debate of it may seem either needless or unseasonable. Something, therefore, may be spoken to evidence that the reader is not imposed on by that which may absolutely fall under either of these characters. Had the end in and by these discourses been effectually accomplished, it had been altogether useless to renew an endeavor unto the same purpose. But whereas an opposition unto the Scripture, and the grounds whereon we believe it to be a divine revelation, is still openly continued among us, a continuation of the defense of the one and the other cannot reasonably be judged either needless or unseasonable.¶<sup>2</sup>

Besides, most of the discourses published of late on this subject have had their peculiar designs, wherein that here tendered is not expressly engaged. For some of them do principally aim to prove that we have sufficient grounds to believe the Scripture, without any recourse unto or reliance upon the authoritative proposal of the Church of Rome, which they have sufficiently evinced<sup>3</sup> beyond any possibility of rational contradiction from their

1 Owen includes an appendix at the end of this treatise enumerating his presuppositions, points of argument, and authors who agree with him.

2 The ¶ symbol indicates that a paragraph break has been added to Owen's original text.

3 I.e., provided evidence for.



adversaries. Others have pleaded and vindicated those rational considerations whereby our assent unto the divine origin of it is fortified and confirmed, against the exceptions and objections of such whose love of sin and resolutions to live therein tempt them to seek for shelter in an atheistical contempt of the authority of God, evidencing itself therein. But as neither of these are utterly neglected in the ensuing discourse, so the peculiar design of it is of another nature; for the inquiries managed therein—namely, “What is the obligation upon us to believe the Scripture to be the word of God? What are the causes, and what is the nature of that faith whereby we do so? What it rests on and is resolved into, so as to become a divine and acceptable duty?”—do respect the consciences of men immediately, and the way whereby they may come to rest and assurance in believing. Whereas, therefore, it is evident that many are often shaken in their minds with those atheistical objections against the divine origin and authority of the Scripture which they frequently meet with, and that many know not how to extricate themselves from the ensnaring questions that they are often attacked withal about them—not for want of a due assent unto them, but of a right understanding what is the true and formal reason of that assent, what is the firm basis and foundation that it rests upon, what answer they may directly and peremptorily give unto that inquiry, “Wherefore do you believe the Scripture to be the word of God?”—I have endeavored to give them those directions herein that, upon a due examination, they will find compliant with the Scripture itself, right reason, and their own experience. I am not, therefore, altogether without hopes that this small discourse may have its use, and be given out in its proper season.¶

Moreover, I think it necessary to acquaint the reader that, as I have allowed all the arguments pleaded by others to prove the divine authority of the Scripture their proper place and force, so where I differ in the explication of anything belonging unto this subject from the conceptions of other men, I have candidly examined such opinions and the arguments wherewith<sup>4</sup> they are confirmed, without straining the words, caviling<sup>5</sup> at the expressions, or reflections on the persons of any of the authors of them. And whereas I have myself been otherwise dealt with by many, and know not how soon I may be so again, I do hereby free the persons of such humors and inclinations from all fear of any reply from me, or the least notice of what they shall be pleased to write or say. Such kind of writings are of the same consideration with me as those multiplied false reports which some have raised concerning me, the

4 I.e., by which.

5 I.e., raising a frivolous objection.

most of them so ridiculous and foolish, so alien from my principles, practices, and course of life, as I cannot but wonder how any persons pretending to gravity and sobriety are not sensible how their credulity and inclinations are abused in the hearing and repetition of them.¶

The occasion of this discourse is that which, in the last place, I shall acquaint the reader with. About three years since I published a book about the dispensation and operations of the Spirit of God. That book was one part only of what I designed on that subject.<sup>6</sup> The consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of illumination, of supplication, of consolation, and as the immediate author of all spiritual offices and gifts, extraordinary and ordinary, is designed unto the second part of it. Hereof this ensuing discourse is concerning one part of his work as a Spirit of illumination, which, upon the earnest requests of some acquainted with the nature and substance of it, I have suffered to come out by itself, that it might be of the more common use and more easily obtained.

May 11, 1677

6 *Πνευματολογία, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit: Wherein an Account Is Given of His Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations, and Effects; His Whole Work in the Old and New Creation Is Explained; the Doctrine concerning It Vindicated from Oppositions and Reproaches. The Nature also and Necessity of Gospel Holiness; the Difference between Grace and Morality, or a Spiritual Life unto God in Evangelical Obedience and a Course of Moral Virtues, Are Stated and Declared* (1674).



# The Reason of Faith

*or,*

*The Grounds Whereon the Scripture Is Believed  
to Be the  
Word of God with Faith Divine  
and Supernatural*



# The Subject Stated

## Preliminary Remarks

THE PRINCIPAL DESIGN of that discourse whereof the ensuing treatise is a part, is to declare the work of the Holy Ghost in the illumination of the minds of men. For this work is particularly and eminently ascribed unto him, or the efficacy of the grace of God by him dispensed (Eph. 1:17–18; Heb. 6:4; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 16:14; 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:9). The objective cause and outward means of it are the subjects at present designed unto consideration; and it will issue in these two inquiries.

1. On what grounds, or for what reason, we do believe the Scripture to be the word of God with faith divine and supernatural, as it is required of us in a way of duty?
2. How or by what means we may come to understand aright the mind of God in the Scripture, or the revelations that are made unto us of his mind and will therein?

For by illumination in general, as it denotes an effect wrought in the minds of men, I understand that supernatural knowledge that any man has or may have of the mind and will of God, as revealed unto him by supernatural means, for the law of his faith, life, and obedience. And this, so far as it is comprised in the first of these inquiries, is that whose declaration we at present design, reserving the latter unto a distinct discourse by itself also.<sup>1</sup> Unto the former some things may be premised.

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to the second treatise in this volume, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein* (1678).

## DIVINE REVELATION: SIX PREMISES

1. Supernatural revelation is the only objective cause and means of supernatural illumination. These things are commensurate. There is a natural knowledge of supernatural things, and that both theoretical and practical (Rom. 1:19; 2:14–15). And there may be a supernatural knowledge of natural things (1 Kings 4:31–34; Ex. 31:2–6). But unto this supernatural illumination it is required both that its object be things only supernaturally revealed, or as supernaturally revealed (1 Cor. 2:9–10), and that it be wrought in us by a supernatural efficiency, or the immediate efficacy of the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:17–19; 2 Cor. 4:6). This David prays for, גל עיני, “Reveal,” or “uncover mine eyes,” bring light and spiritual understanding into my mind, “that I may behold (ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ, ‘with open face,’ or as in the Syriac, באפא גליחא, ‘with a revealed or uncovered face,’ the veil being taken away [2 Cor. 3:18]) wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18). The light he prayed for within did merely respect the doctrine of the law without. This the apostle fully declares (Heb. 1:1–2). The various supernatural revelations that God has made of himself, his mind and will, from first to last, are the sole and adequate object of supernatural illumination.

2. This divine external revelation was originally, by various ways, which we have elsewhere declared, given unto sundry persons immediately, partly for their own instruction and guidance in the knowledge of God and his will, and partly by their ministry to be communicated unto the church.<sup>2</sup> So was it granted unto Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who thereon prophesied, to the warning and instruction of others (Jude 14–15). And to Noah, who became thereby a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). And to Abraham, who thereon commanded his children and household to keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19). And other instances of the like kind may be given (Gen. 4:26; 5:29). And this course did God continue a long time, even from the first promise to the giving of the law, before any revelations were committed to writing, for the space of 2,460 years; for so long a season did God enlighten the minds of men by supernatural, external, immediate, occasional revelations. Sundry things may be observed of this divine dispensation, as

2 Owen is likely referring to his *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures; with an Answer to That Inquiry, How We Know the Scriptures to Be the Word of God; also, a Vindication of the Purity and Integrity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Old and New Testament; in Some Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the Late Biblia Polyglotta. Whereunto Are Subjoined Some Exercitations about the Nature and Perfection of the Scripture, the Right of Interpretation, Internal Light, Revelation, Etc.* (1659).

(1) That it did sufficiently evidence itself to be from God unto the minds of those unto whom it was granted, and theirs also unto whom these revelations were by them communicated. For during this season Satan used his utmost endeavors to possess the minds of men with his delusions, under the pretense of divine, supernatural inspirations; for hereunto belongs the origin of all his oracles and enthusiasms<sup>3</sup> among the nations of the world. There was, therefore, a divine power and efficacy attending all divine revelations, ascertaining and infallibly assuring the minds of men of their being from God; for if it had not been so, men had never been able to secure themselves that they were not imposed on by the crafty deceits of Satan, especially in such revelations as seemed to contain things contrary to their reason, as in the command given to Abraham for the sacrificing his son (Gen. 22:2). Wherefore, these immediate revelations had not been a sufficient means to secure the faith and obedience of the church if they had not carried along with them their own evidence that they were from God. Of what nature that evidence was we shall afterward inquire. For the present I shall only say, that it was an evidence unto faith, and not to sense; as is that also which we have now by the Scripture. It is not like that which the sun gives of itself by its light, which there needs no exercise of reason to assure us of, for sense is irresistibly affected with it. But it is like the evidence which the heavens and the earth give of their being made and created of God, and thereby of his being and power. This they do undeniably and infallibly (Ps. 19:1–2; Rom. 1:19–21). Yet it is required hereunto that men do use and exercise the best of their rational abilities in the consideration and contemplation of them. Where this is neglected, notwithstanding their open and visible evidence unto the contrary, men degenerate into atheism. God so gave out these revelations of himself as to require the exercise of the faith, conscience, obedience, and reason of them unto whom they were made, and therein they gave full assurance of their proceeding from him. So, he tells us that his word differs from all other pretended revelations as the “wheat does from the chaff” (Jer. 23:28). But yet it is our duty to try and sift the wheat from the chaff, or we may not evidently discern the one from the other.

(2) The things so revealed were sufficient to guide and direct all persons in the knowledge of their duty to God, in all that was required of them in a way of faith or obedience. God from the beginning gave out the knowledge of his will πολυμερῶς, “by sundry parts and degrees”; yet so that every age and season had light enough to guide them in the whole obedience required

3 I.e., claims of receiving extrabiblical, external, immediate revelations after the close of the canon.