

**Sinclair B. Ferguson. *John Owen on the Christian Life*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, 297 pp.**

**By Brian G. Najapfour**

*John Owen on the Christian Life* is one of Ferguson's great works serving as an introductory guide to John Owen. Its first chapter provides a succinct summary of Owen's life, while the rest of the chapters survey his Christian doctrine with a focus on his substantial teachings. Oftentimes, it is said that Owen is not easy to read, and thus many have tended to shun his works and consequently miss the treasures there. Thankfully, however, Ferguson has laboriously mined those treasures and made them accessible to those unable to mine for themselves. Even experienced researchers have benefited from Ferguson's labor, in that many post-Reformation authors have been encouraged and motivated to write on Owen since the publication of his book in 1987. *John Owen on the Christian Life* has become a standard reference for twenty-first century Owen writers.

This work is especially welcome by lay people because of its simplicity in style. Ferguson purposely avoids technical emphasis in order to cater to the need of popular readers. Thus, for the past two decades, *John Owen on the Christian Life* has been one of the best works on Owen written for a wide audience. Pastors also have greatly appreciated this book because of its experiential emphasis. Ferguson penned his book with pastoral passion and practical purpose, hoping that his book "will promote spiritual growth, and give help and encouragement to those who share, as Owen did, in the leading and guiding of the people of God" (xi).

Undoubtedly, Ferguson learned such experiential stress from Owen himself. Ferguson writes, "Every thing he [Owen] wrote for his contemporaries had a practical and pastoral aim in view—the promotion of true Christian living" (xi). It is then very important to peruse Owen's works in a pastoral context. Owen's main goal in writing was to promote holiness, according to his assistant David Clarkson. Owen himself testifies of it:

I hope I may own in sincerity, that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life in the station wherein the good providence of God hath placed me, are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things (Quoted in p. 19).

Hence, anyone who studies Owen without this motive in mind will lose the purpose for which Owen wrote. Ferguson should be then commended for uncovering Owen's experiential theme in writing. This is his great contribution to the field of Owen. Ferguson's emphasis also encourages the readers to look into Owen's texts despite their occasionally abstruse nature, and challenges other authors to also write experientially.

The book is well organized; however, its footnotes and block quotations seem to have not been properly done. But this is of little importance.