

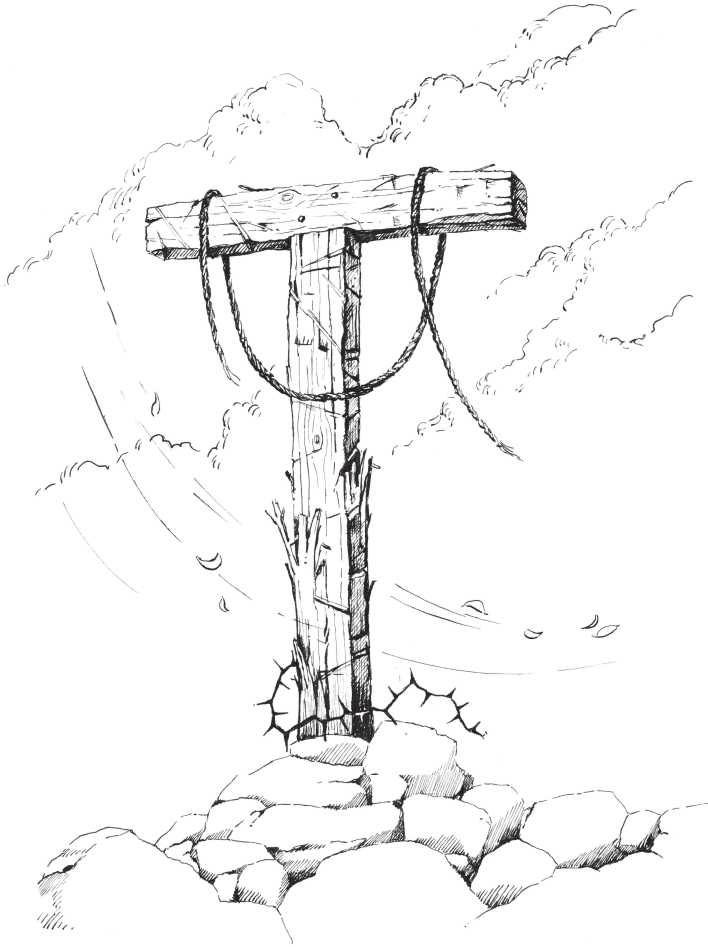
# the enemy within

*Straight Talk about  
the Power and Defeat of Sin*

REVISED EDITION

**Kris Lundgaard**

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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*“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of  
our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been  
crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

GAL. 6:14

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Where applicable, Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV’s alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* (“brothers and sisters”).

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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To Nicholas,  
my son,  
for victory!



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# preface to the revised edition

A few months after *The Enemy Within* was published, my editor mailed me a photocopy (that tells you how long ago it was) of the book's first review. I can't find it now, but I remember the reviewer's reservation. He said that the author focused on the individual struggle against the flesh to the complete exclusion of the corporate. He was right, and that was a weakness. Since then, I've said that if I ever had a chance to revise the book, I'd try to repair that.

My book was based on John Owen's writings about sin, and in those books he doesn't describe corporate weapons against the flesh, so without his "authorization" I didn't think I could justify a revision to slip something in. But last summer I stumbled across a reference to a page in Owen's treatise on apostasy where he mentions the need to mortify sin. He tells his readers that he has already written on the subject, and if they can find nothing better, they can read his discourses on sin. But then he adds that if they are unable on their own to mortify some especially entrenched sin, "let them not delay to acquaint some *able spiritual guide* with their state and condition."<sup>1</sup> He appeals to James 5:16

1. John Owen, "Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 7, Sin and Grace (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 239, his emphasis.



and commends the practice of mutual confession, saying it has sometimes “scattered at once the forces of sin in the soul.”<sup>2</sup>

It just so happens that when I thought about adding a chapter to *The Enemy Within*, the very “corporate weapon” I had in mind was mutual confession of sin. My inspiration had been Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s last chapter of *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer helped me understand why mutual confession is so effective against sin.<sup>3</sup>

Convinced that I had Owen’s approval, I asked P&R whether it might be time for a revised edition. They liked the idea, and besides adding a chapter, I have taken the opportunity to make a few structural and stylistic changes.

2. Owen, 239.

3. Others have helped: see William R. Edwards, “Sanctification: A Pastor’s Labor for the Obedience of Faith,” in *Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice*, eds. William R. Edwards, John C. A. Ferguson, and Chad Van Dixhoorn (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2022), 271–73.

# preface to the first edition

“If God has redeemed me from sin, and given me his Holy Spirit to sanctify me and give me strength against sin, why do I go on sinning?” This question has plagued me throughout my life of faith. In my lowest moments it has brought despair; it has even darkened the edges of my brightest times.

In the late summer of 1996, I stumbled across something helpful, something that has given me hope. The name John Owen kept popping up over the years, especially when I read J. I. Packer’s books.<sup>1</sup> I steered clear of Owen because I knew from a few forays into his books in seminary that the going would be slow and hard. But when the impotence of my sanctification became glaringly clear to me, every obstacle was overcome, and I picked up my dusty copy of *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*.<sup>2</sup>

1. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990); *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor: Vine, 1992); *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984).

2. John Owen, *Works*, ed. William Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–53). Both *Indwelling Sin* and *The Mortification of Sin* are in volume 6. Sixteen of the volumes of Goold’s edition were reprinted photographically by the Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–68.

Over the next few weeks, I wrestled my way through Owen's cumbersome syntax and antiquated vocabulary, taking an hour to put eight or ten pages behind me. I was reading every sentence two, three, or four times, looking up every Bible reference, thumbing through my dictionary to find "aversation" and "inadvertency," and underlining 80 percent of what I read. It was for my mind the backbreaking work of digging a mine with a pickax. But there was gold along the way—not just a handful of dust, but a motherlode of nuggets.

The gold I found was hope, renewed love for Christ, and an approach to holiness by faith in him. Along the way I was sick to my stomach over my sin, yet somehow lifted up to the cross for deliverance. When I finished *Indwelling Sin*, I didn't miss a beat but drove my pick into *The Mortification of Sin*. By now the whole way I looked at holiness was changing, and I believed that by God's grace, looking into the face of Christ to see his glory, I could resist sin to the point of shedding my blood (Heb. 12:1–4).

My heart wants to share this hope. Over and over in small groups and discipling conversations, I have heard my own anguished question ("Why do I still sin?") from the lips of friends. I know John Owen's unfolding of the Scriptures is just what we all need to hear. But I know also that few will ever trouble themselves to hack through his ponderous prose, no matter how passionately I recommend him. The trip back to the seventeenth century is too far. So I decided to bring Owen into the twenty-first century.

I haven't simply abridged Owen, as others have done.<sup>3</sup> I kidnapped him. By force I took him as my coauthor, and

3. I particularly appreciate and recommend R. J. K. Law's *The Glory of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1994) and *Communion with God* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1991).

together we've written a new book. He brought to the table his precious exposition, outlines, arguments, and illustrations, and I returned to him stories of bone-marrow transplants and torx sockets as I tried to bring his profound understanding of the Bible into our world.

My aim may be expressed by one unretouched sentence from the end of Owen's preface to *The Mortification of Sin*:

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: for the compassing of which end, if this little discourse . . . may in any thing be useful to the least of the saints, it will be looked on as a return of the weak prayers wherewith it is attended by its unworthy author,

Kris Lundgaard



# acknowledgments

This book is clearer than it would have been, thanks to guinea pigs Eric Hoxworth, James Lines, Randy Scott, Geof Smith, the University Presbyterian Church senior high youth group, and one patient adult education class (Brea Smith, Mark and Pam Pflieger, Ed Emerick, Scot Horne, Ed and Patty Hughs, Charlene Hoskins, David Smith, and Johnnie Coble).

Paula Lundgaard, Charlene Hoskins, and Ed and Patty Hughs read and reflected, critiqued and encouraged. Dr. Ed Hoskins clarified and corrected my medical illustrations. (I couldn't use John Owen's seventeenth-century medical stories because I don't know what bile and humours are.) Senior pastor John Pickett argued with me about sanctification till we both knew better what we were talking about.

Editor Thom Notaro at P&R gave the manuscript a close reading and polished it up, while Barbara Lerch gave sparkling encouragement.

J. I. Packer, though he doesn't know me, gets credit for introducing me to Owen in his class on the English Puritans at Reformed Theological Seminary and through his frequent expositions of Owen in his books.

I'm grateful to P&R for allowing me to revise the book after so long. Several kind friends read the new chapter for the

revised edition and helped me refine it: Mark Cary, John Pickett, Quinn Hill, Eric Landry, Eric Manthei, Paul McDonald, Randy Scott, and Geof Smith. (Remarkably, John, Randy, and Geof had helped with the original manuscript twenty-five years ago.) My friend Lenka Knoetze's drawing of *The Cursed Tree* (frontispiece) provokes reflection on our Lord's suffering and our calling. Dave Almack, Amanda Martin, Aaron Gottier, and the team at P&R encouraged and challenged me—and I can't imagine writing a book without both.

If John Owen were alive, he'd be tempted to sue me, I stole so much of his material. I'll apologize and thank him when I see him in glory.

We all worked together *solī Deo gloria*.

*Part One*

**the power of sin  
in what it is**

*We have met the enemy and he is us.*

—Pogo





# 1

## evil at my elbow

*God strengthen me to bear myself;  
That heaviest weight of all to bear,  
Inalienable weight of care.*

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

### *I Feel the Same Way Too*

All I wanted to do was surprise my wife.

Since we had moved into our new house almost a year earlier, the refrigerator door handle had been on the wrong side. I had put off moving it because of my clumsiness with mechanical things. But on this Thursday afternoon while my wife was at work, I was set to redeem myself and right the wrong.

I was halfway through the job. I had the refrigerator and freezer doors off and wanted to get them back on soon so no food would spoil. I was at the pivotal step of swapping the hinges from the right side of the refrigerator to the left when I realized that each hinge was fastened by two torx screws. Two lousy torx screws. There is only one tool in the universe that can (safely) remove a torx screw: a torx socket.

I didn't have a torx socket.

Right then my three boys decided to pile their Traveling Sibling Rivalry Show onto my frustration. I lost it. I let them have it, though they didn't deserve it. They stared at me as if I were a monster from Alpha Centauri while I ranted in an unknown tongue.

In mid-fit I had an out-of-body experience. I saw my contorted red face screaming at my beloved boys and knew at once I was doing something evil. So I stopped and asked their forgiveness, right? Wrong. Something had control of me. It was as if an alien had invaded my body and was forcing me to do his bidding. It was long after they had fled my wrath before I recovered my sanity and my conscience and humbled myself before them in overdue apologies.

I spent the next several days feeling like a whipped puppy. Was I really that wicked? How could I hurt my children like that? Had I done irreparable harm? Would they forgive me?

Would God forgive me?

Anything like that ever happen to you?

When I read Romans 7, I am consoled by the fact that Paul felt the same way too.<sup>1</sup> He helps me understand my madness and gives me some useful descriptive terms for it: "the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23), "this body of death" (v. 24), "my flesh" (v. 18), "sin that dwells within me" (v. 17), just plain "sin" (v. 11), and "the law of sin and death" (8:2). Theologians like to call it *indwelling sin*. I will use all these terms interchangeably, but whatever we call it, it's an enemy of God and of our souls.<sup>2</sup> The first step to

1. Romans 7 has been variously interpreted, but I'm convinced that Paul is describing the experience of a believer rather than an unbeliever. For more authoritative opinions see J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984), 263–70, and John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5–8*, American ed. (1966; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 71–75.

2. There are two other enemies: the world and the devil. I will not deal with them explicitly. But since they both work their mischief by appealing

fighting this enemy is to know it, and to know it well. That's my aim in this book.

The foundation of our knowledge of the power of indwelling sin in the life of a believer is laid in Paul's own experience. He slugged his way through the fight till, at times, he was on the ropes, crying out from the edge of defeat (Rom. 7:23–24). Yet when the bell rang, he stood with his foot on the neck of his enemy and held up his hand to receive “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

### *Four Key Truths*

If we want to stand in conquest over our bleeding flesh, we'll have to follow Paul into the fight. When we do, we'll find the same four truths that humbled him in battle, all expressed in one verse: “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand” (Rom. 7:21).

#### **The Sin That Lives in Us Is a “Law”**

The “law” Paul refers to is the same thing he calls “sin that dwells within me” (v. 20) and “sin that dwells in my members” (v. 23). This is the indwelling sin we are talking about. Why call it a *law*?

Paul uses law as a metaphor. He needs a way to express the power, authority, constraint, and control that sin wields in our lives, and he picks the word *law* with a touch of irony. He has been writing earlier in the chapter of *God's law*, which is supposed to rule our lives, yet the law of *sin* seems to win a lot of head-to-head battles. Could he have chosen a more stunning contrast to unmask sin's deadly force?

---

to our flesh (indwelling sin), any victory over the flesh will work to weaken them as well.

Chew on the metaphor of law for a minute. We can think of law in one way as a moral rule that directs and commands us to do what it requires (“Honor your parents”) or not do what it forbids (“Do not trespass”). More than that, a law entices us to obey with offers of reward (“you will live long in the land”) and compels us to submit by threats of punishment for disobedience (“\$500 fine for trespassing”).

We can also think of law in the sense we mean when we speak of “laws of nature.” Gravity, for example, perfectly conforms us to its “commands.” It’s a law not as an idea or an outward precept but as a force that can make objects “obey” its “will.” In this sense, every urge and inclination in us is a law. Hunger is a law, as are thirst, sexual drive, and fear. Each impels us to fulfill its demands, and each brings a force to bear on us to bow us into submission.

Indwelling sin works like this: enticing, threatening, even bullying. So Paul calls it a law to get us to see that it is powerful even in the lives of believers and that it constantly works to press us into its evil mold.

That raises the question “In what sense has Christ defeated sin in the believer?” The answer is that he has overthrown its rule, weakened its power, and even killed its root so that it cannot bear the fruit of eternal death in a believer. Still—and this is amazing but true—sin is sin; its nature and purpose remain unchanged; its force and success still grab us by the throat.

There is an analogy between our sanctification and Christ’s coming to earth. In his first coming, he inaugurated his kingdom—he is already reigning; he defeated the god of this age and sits on his throne at the right hand of the Father—yet the opposition remains, battles continue. In his second coming, he will consummate his kingdom, ridding it of every enemy. Similarly, our new birth is the first coming of Christ to our soul: he truly reigns in our heart, but the defeated enemy remains, and battles continue.

Our glorification after death is the second coming of Christ to our soul, when every trace of the law of sin will be no more.

### **We Find This Law inside Us**

Paul had heard horror stories about sin all his life. He had seen countless bony fingers in his face to warn him of sin's power. But in Romans 7:21 he moves from comfortable theory into troubling experience: he *finds* this to be a law. It is one thing to sit in a group and critique dissertations on original sin; it is something else to find yourself subdued by its strength and madness. It is one thing to listen to a lecture about how cancer spreads, what it does to a body, how after a certain point it can't be beat; it is another thing to hear your doctor say to you, "Stage 4 pancreatic cancer."

Few people come to terms with the law of sin. If more of us did, we would complain of it more often in our prayers, struggle more against it, and find less of its fruit in our lives. When we find this law in us, Paul's "Who shall deliver me?" echoes down our bones.

Believers are the only people who find the law of sin at work in them. Unbelievers can't feel it. The law of sin is a raging river, carrying them along; they cannot measure the force of the current, because they have surrendered themselves to it and are borne along by it. Believers, however, swim upstream: they meet sin head-on and strain under its strength.

### **We Find This Law When We're at Our Best**

Paul found the law of sin at work in him even while he wanted to do right. He didn't stumble onto it in a time of great backsliding, or when he was indifferent about the things of God. He was aware of it even when he most wanted to serve God, when he set his mind to obey his Savior and King, when Christ ruled his heart.

Though the law of sin works from the inside and ambushes believers at their best, it isn't their dictator. As powerful as it is, it doesn't rule their hearts. Believers march to a different Drummer: "I want to do right," Paul says (Rom. 7:21). Believers want to please God, give him glory, serve his people, honor his name. By God's grace, the desire to obey him ordinarily prevails in us, even against this insidious enemy within.

Though grace ordinarily prevails in us, in this life it never does so perfectly (Gal. 5:17). Even in our most loving, humble moments, a touch of pride slips in to tarnish our most righteous works. Therefore, we must live in continual and absolute dependence on Christ.

John described the heart of the believer renewed by Christ and under his rule: "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). To "make a practice of sinning" and to "keep on sinning" mean to make sin a career in life. The believer has a new nature: "God's seed abides in him." This new nature cannot live at peace with sin. This distinguishes believers at their *worst* from unbelievers at their *best*. Even when believers stumble and seem most to be bullied by the tyrant sin, their new hearts still hate sin, so that they have no peace until it is crushed. But even unbelievers who appear on the surface to be kind and respectable will, if God removes his restraining grace, willingly give themselves to sin; the Spirit of God and the new birth are essential to the struggle against sin.

### **This Law Never Rests**

Since grace rules believers' hearts, we want to do good. We can describe that desire in two ways. First, there is our general and constant desire to please God (Rom. 7:18). Second, there are times when we have a particular duty in mind that we want to perform, such as spending time in private prayer or giving a

tenth of our income to God (“when I want to do right,” v. 21). The law of sin opposes both.

The “law of sin and death” is in a constant tug-of-war against believers’ overall desire to please God (vv. 14–25). But sin goes further: when we set our jaws to even the simplest duty to God, sin fights us right at that point (“evil lies close at hand,” v. 21), making us drowsy or distracted when we would pray or stingy and ambitious when we would give.

Don’t you sometimes feel like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Every believer who is also a sinner (that is, every believer) does. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal. 5:17).

*Who shall deliver me?*

## *Our Wisdom*

We are at the beginning of our war against the flesh. To understand these four truths about indwelling sin is to arm ourselves against it. In our struggle against sin, there is only one thing more important to grasp than these four facts: the free, justifying grace of God that is won for us by Christ’s blood. The grace of God in Christ and the law of sin are the two fountains of all our holiness and sin, joy and trouble, refreshment and sorrow. If we are to walk with God and glorify him in this world, we need to stand resolutely in that grace and against sin.

Suppose there is a kingdom that has within its walls two mighty opposing forces. The subjects of the king are at odds, always feuding and plotting against each other. If the king is not wise, his kingdom will be laid waste. The law of sin and the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) in us are mortal enemies. If we are not spiritually wise in managing our souls, how can we help making a wreck of ourselves?



But many of us live in darkness and ignorance about our own hearts. We get regular checkups at the doctor; we watch what we eat and work out at the gym four times a week to keep our bodies fit. But how many of us give such attention to the health of our souls? If it is important to watch over and care for our bodies, which will soon turn to dust, how much more important is it for us to guard our immortal souls?

Getting to know indwelling sin, as humiliating and discouraging as it can be, is wise, if we have any interest at all in finding out what is pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10) and avoiding everything that grieves his Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

### *Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. Read through Romans 7:14–25. Which phrase or phrases best describe your own experience?
2. Can you think of ways the law of sin offers rewards for obeying it and threatens punishment for ignoring it? (We'll see more on this in the next chapter.)
3. Think of a time when you “found” the law of sin in you—when it seemed to take over and bend you to its will even, as it were, against your will. Describe how it happened, as you understand it.
4. What do you think is the most frustrating thing about the sin in your heart?
5. If it is true that the law of sin in you never rests, what hope do you have?
6. Read Luke 12:15 and Matthew 26:41. Considering this chapter, describe the daily diligence you need in order to heed Jesus's warnings.
7. What do you hope to gain through studying this book? Write a prayer asking God to make it so in your life.