

FOREWORD BY ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD



# KNOWING SIN

SEEING A NEGLECTED  
DOCTRINE THROUGH

THE EYES OF THE PURITANS

MARK JONES

## **R** BOOK REVIEW // KNOWING SIN

MARK JONES // REVIEWED BY JAMES JEFFERY

In the 6th century AD, the Chinese general and strategist Sun Tzu said:

*“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.*

*If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat.*

*If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”*

Such is the case when it comes to the Christian’s warfare with sin. In *Knowing Sin*, Jones argues that if we aren’t intimately acquainted with our opposition, we will fail to grasp the gravity of the battle we are engaged in (Ephesians 6:12). Conversely, if we devote time and energy to grasping the true origin, nature, and destination of sin, we will be equipped and armed to face the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Here are three reasons Jones’ book is critical for Christians today:

### **1. A BIBLICAL, NOT PSYCHOLOGICAL, APPROACH**

Jones implicitly highlights how secularisation has brought the psychologization of sin — that is, the interpretation and understanding of sin not from Scripture, but through the lens of atheistic materialism. This thinking has even infiltrated the minds of many believers, as we have been led to think about sin in unbiblical terms.

Jones explains:

*“To merely describe sin as “missing the mark” is a gross injustice to the actual vocabulary of the Bible and the nature of sin...Sin is theocentric (Rom. 1:18-32), and thus illegal (Rom. 3:20). In this sense, it is anti-relational as we, the offenders, rise up in enmity against God the offended” (p. 52)*

Thus, the greatest manual is not any secular publication or technique, but the Bible. Jones elucidates how the Bible explains human nature with a candour, simplicity, and depth that no other document does. Drawing from the well of divine grace, *Knowing Sin* explores how the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for a transformed heart and life.

### **2. GOD’S GRACE IS GREATER THAN OUR SIN**

Jones recognises that only those who recognise something of the heinousness of their sin will search for the Saviour. Stripping away any vestige of self-righteousness that may remain in us, Jones leads us to a place of desperation where we recognise that Jesus is the only one who offers healing and restoration. He writes, ‘just as there is a rich vocabulary for sin, there is an even richer one for grace’ (p. 60).

He continues:

*“As the hymn “Grace Greater Than Our Sin” testifies, this is a “marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe.” Indeed, it is a “grace that is greater than all our sin,” even*

the worst” (p. 183)

Only with empty hands can we experience the joy and freedom which comes when we daily approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

### 3. A TREASURE TROVE OF PURITAN QUOTES

The Puritans understood sin because they studied the deepest recesses of the human heart. They devoted even more time to expounding the grace of God through the victory won for us through Jesus Christ.

Drawing on a range of Puritans from John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, to Jeremiah Burroughs and Stephen Charnock, Jones makes the Puritans accessible to contemporary readers. Jones excavates and presents their pithy quotes, lucid word pictures, and rich Biblical exegesis — profound gifts to the modern Christian.

For instance, Jones quotes Thomas Brooks:

*“The higher the springs of godly sorrow rise, the higher the tides of holy joy rise. His graces will flourish most, who evangelically mourns most”* (p. 79)

Therefore, this book is worth buying if only for its

rich compilation of Puritan quotes. The footnotes alone make it an invaluable resource for all Christians to read.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Unlike many contemporary Christian books, Jones’ work is not cliché. Quite the opposite, *Knowing Sin* is the product of countless hours of thoughtful meditation and a pastoral heart. Jones makes the Biblical teaching on sin both accessible and digestible.

Whether you are currently feeling enslaved to the fangs of sin or recognise the need to prepare yourself for the inevitable battles that lie ahead, this book is for you. It will challenge you, expose you, and rattle you to your core. Jones leaves us bare before our holy God, revealing just how desperately wicked we are.

While this may seem unbefitting for a Christian book, Jones shows that it is only when we recognise the true nature of our sinful estate that we can savour and treasure height, depth, and length of God’s grace for us. For this reason, *Knowing Sin* will likely be a crucial resource for Christians for years to come.

## KNOW YOUR ENEMY

We don’t talk about sin these days as much as we should. The Puritans understood and articulated the power of sin in a uniquely profound way. They wanted to root it out of their lives. Shouldn’t we want the same?

Though many books have been written on the “doctrine of sin,” few are as practical and applicable as *Knowing Sin*. Puritan scholar Mark Jones distills the vast wisdom of our Christian forebears into a single volume that summarizes their thought on this vital subject. You’ll come to understand topics like:

SIN’S ORIGIN	SIN’S TEMPTATIONS
SIN’S GRIEF	SIN’S MISERY
SIN’S THOUGHTS	SIN’S SECRECY
SIN’S VOCABULARY	SIN’S DEFEAT

None of us is free from the struggle with sin. The question isn’t whether we’re sinful, it’s what we’re doing about it. Thanks be to God, there is a path to overcoming sin. And the first step on that path to victory is knowing what we’re up against. Start *Knowing Sin* today!

MARK JONES (PhD, Leiden University) is the senior minister at Faith Vancouver Presbyterian Church (PCA). He is the author and editor of many books and speaks all over the world on topics related to the Christian life.

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