

**“Sudden Death”**

*Sermon Notes*

- **In Adam’s fall we sinned *all*, so human beings are sinners - by nature and by choice**

*\*The sins of our first parents were those of commission as well as omission...*

1. Like Eve...we sin by what we have done (v.6a)
2. Like Adam...we sin by what we have left undone (v.6b)

**Next Week: Genesis 3:7-8 - “Naked & Ashamed”**

# MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of October 5th-11th

## **Interview with John Owen on the Subject of Indwelling Sin**

**Pastor Dave:** Welcome back for round two, Pastor John. I am delighted that you've returned to speak with us about *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*. I've actually shortened your title by more than half its length.<sup>1</sup> In the 21st century, we wouldn't consider what you've got there a title as much as a table of contents. Good grief.

The foundational text for your book is a single verse in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 7:21 -“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.” In the same paragraph, Paul laments that: “I am of the flesh...sin...dwells within me [2x!]...I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”<sup>2</sup> That's incredibly sobering. Paul calls the sin that lives within us a “law”. Help us to understand. What does it mean that sin is alive as a “law” within us - even as born again believers?

**Owen:** “...the apostle here call[s] indwelling sin a law [because]...It is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing unto actions agreeable and suitable unto its own nature.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The original title page of Owen's 1667 work reads: *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers. Together With the Ways of Its Working, And Means of Prevention. Opened, Evinc'd, and Applied, with a Resolution of Sundry Cases of Conscience Thereunto Appertaining.*

<sup>2</sup> Romans 7:14, 17, and 20.

<sup>3</sup> There are a number of editions of this work of Owen's, but a good one-stop shop would be *Overcoming Sin & Temptation: Three Classic Works By John Owen*. Edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Crossway: Wheaton. 2006. Each of the quotations from Owen in this study guide are drawn from this edition. This paperback carries with it a forward by John Piper, carefully outlined chapter breakdowns, and helpful footnotes that define a number of older words common to Owen's vocabulary. Three of Owen's great works on these themes are included: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It* (1658), and *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers* (1667). This particular quote came from page 234.

**Pastor Dave:** Okay...but sin's own nature is opposition unto God (Romans 8:7; 1 John 3:4) and its goal is death (James 1:14-15). Are you saying that within every Spirit-indwelt Christian remains a nature that is still hostile to God and desires to produce death in and through us?

**Owen:** "Indwelling sin is effectually operative in rebelling and inclining to evil, [even] when the will of doing good is in a particular manner active and inclining toward obedience...Many men live in the dark to themselves all their days; whatever else they know, they know not themselves."<sup>4</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** This is alarming. As you said, I don't doubt that many folks fail to know their own hearts as they ought.

**Owen:** "They live and walk as though they intended to go to heaven hood-winked and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal with...*there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainder of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant inclination and working toward evil.* Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is anything of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only *upon* you...but is *in* you also.

Would you not dishonor God and his gospel; would you not scandalize the saints and ways of God; would you not wound consciences and endanger your souls; would you not grieve the good and holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts; would you keep your garments undefiled, and escape the woeful temptations and pollutions of the days wherein we live; would be preserved from the number of apostates in the latter days? Awake to the consideration of this cursed enemy, which is the spring of all these and innumerable other evils, as also of the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world! "<sup>5</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Thank you for those sobering words. Now, perhaps a theological clarification at this point. You believe that all regenerate believers will persevere in their faith all the way to heaven. You even wrote a book defending this doctrine from the pages of Scripture back in 1654: *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*. Why, then, do you find it so imperative to warn born again Christians regarding indwelling sin? Aren't they going to heaven either way?

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<sup>4</sup> Owen, p.238.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, p.239.

**Owen:** “Men little consider what a dangerous companion is always with them When they are in company, when alone, by night or by day, all is one, sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses; which if it be not looked unto will fire them, and it may be consume them. Oh, the woeful security of poor souls!”<sup>6</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** You warn your readers much like the New Testament does. There most certainly are those who fall away from the Christian faith (Hebrews 3:12), and though they *professed* faith in Christ they didn’t genuinely *possess* faith in Christ (John 8:30-32; Hebrews 3:14; 1 John 2:19). The doctrine of [the perseverance of the saints](#) for you is clearly no license for laxity in the intensity of our discipleship. In fact, much to the contrary. To answer my own earlier question: ***no**...such persons are **not** ‘going to heaven either way’*. As Hebrews 12:14 makes plain: “...without holiness no one will see the Lord.” The broad road does not lead to life but to everlasting destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

**Owen:** “[Furthermore] There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit...Let us, then, reckon on it, that there is no way to have our work done but by always doing of it; and he who dies fighting in this warfare dies assuredly a conqueror.”<sup>7</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Once again, this is clarifying - not to mention, motivating. Tell us more.

**Owen:** “Grace changes the nature of a man, but nothing can change the nature of sin...Destroyed it may be, it shall be, but cured it cannot be.”<sup>8</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Sin is resolved to have its way, or no way at all. What, do you think, is at the root of sin? What I mean is, when sin manifests itself in our hearts, what does it indicate about our fallen nature?

**Owen:** “Every act of sin is a fruit of being weary of God.”<sup>9</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Brutal, but true. Our old nature is weary of you, and you are weary of our fallenness as well. The Scriptures bear witness to this reality: Proverbs 3:11; Isaiah 1:14; 7:13; 43:22-24; Jeremiah 15:6; Micah 6:3; Malachi 2:17. Why is it that our hearts become weary of you?

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<sup>6</sup> Owen, pp.246-247.

<sup>7</sup> Owen, p.255.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, pp. 257-258.

<sup>9</sup> Owen, p.260.

**Owen:** “Most men love to hear of the doctrine of grace, of the pardon of sin, of free love, and suppose they find food therein...But to be breaking up the fallow ground of their hearts, to be inquiring after the weeds and briars that grow in them, they delight not so much, though this is no less necessary than the other...herein does the deceit of sin interpose itself: It separates between the doctrine of grace and the use and end of it...turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.”<sup>10</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** It seems at the end of the day here that what we’re really talking about is learning to live our lives on purpose. Christianity doesn’t simply *happen* to us, in other words. We need far less ‘Let go, and let God’ and far more ‘Trust God, and get going’. Wouldn’t you agree?

**Owen:** “Be always serious at spiritual things if you intend to be bettered by them.”<sup>11</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Amen. And I suppose that this is where integrity comes in. Being the same person both in public and in private matters a great deal.

**Owen:** “...what a man is in secret, in these private duties, that he is in the eyes of God, and no more.”<sup>12</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** So, then, if I can draw our first two interviews to a close I’d like to set us up for one final conversation. We considered the biblical teaching concerning temptation last week. We’ve pondered the reality of the sin that indwells us as believers this week. What remains is for us to discuss what it means in real time to “put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit” (Romans 8:13). Killing sin, in other words. Does that sound like the next step in this discussion?

**Owen:** “[Let us now turn to]...our work in contending against sin, in crucifying, mortifying, and subduing of it...”<sup>13</sup>

**Pastor Dave:** Excellent. Grace and peace to you until next time, Pastor John.

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<sup>10</sup> Owen, p.282.

<sup>11</sup> Owen, p.378.

<sup>12</sup> Owen, p.385.

<sup>13</sup> Owen, p.255.