

# Evil Inside Me

*The Enemy Within Series*

*04 February 2006*

*Pastor Matt Black*

*Saturday Leadership Paradigms*

*Romans 7:21*

<<-- Plug the 9:45AM Lord's Day prayer time for men -->>

Introduction: This morning we begin a series of studies on the sinful nature that dwells inside each one of us. My goal in teaching you is that you might not just be a leader of your home, but that you might be a *godly*, humble, pure and broken leader in your home. I want to see all of us broken by God and broken over our sin, but *not* broken *by* our sin. We need to know how to fight against sin in our lives. It is always there. There is an enemy raging within us that is opposed to all we do. We will be learning about that enemy today.

In the months to come we will be using Kris Lundgaard's book as our primary resource. It is called "The Enemy Within,"<sup>1</sup> and is basically a reworking of the old Puritan work on the same subject by John Owen, called "The Mortification of Sin."

*We have met the enemy and he is us.*  
—Walt Kelly in his "Pogo" cartoon strip, 1952

Our study today and in the weeks to come will answer the question, "If I'm saved, why do I keep on sinning?" And we are going to not only attempt to answer that, but to demonstrate how we all might live a life of holiness and burning hot purity for God.

Our text today will be Romans 7:21.

*"I find then a law, that, when I would do good,  
evil is present with me."*

Before we get into this text, let's begin with a story told by Lundgaard which I think we can all relate to. He says:

All I wanted to do was surprise my wife.

Since we had moved into our new house almost a year ago, 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 nothing 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kris Lundgaard. *The Enemy Within* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1998).

I didn't have a torx socket.

Right then my three boys decided to move their Traveling Sibling Rivalry Show into the middle of my angst. 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 charming 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 from my wrath before I recovered my sanity and my conscience and humbled myself before them in groveling apologies.

I spent the next 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?<sup>2</sup>

Well, this has happened to me, and it has happened to all of us. What is it that is happening here? What are we dealing with?

#### Theological Terms

What is it that causes the madness of the above situation? Paul gives several theological terms for this in Romans 7:

- Verse 23, "law of sin"
- Verse 24, "the body of this death"
- Verse 18, "my flesh"
- Verse 17 & 20, "sin that dwelleth [lives] in me"
- Verse 21 "evil present with me"
- Verse 11, plain old "sin"
- 8:2, "the law of sin and death"

Theologians have called it "indwelling sin." Whatever we call it, it's an enemy of God and an enemy of our souls. Now it's not the only enemy. The world and the devil do their share of havoc in our lives. We will not deal with them explicitly in our study, but since they both do their dirty work by appealing to our flesh (indwelling sin), any victory over the flesh will work to weaken them as well.

The first step in defeating the sin that indwells us, or the "evil" that lives inside us, is to know this enemy well.

The foundation of knowing this enemy is found in Paul's own experience. He knew what it was to be defeated:

Romans 7:24

---

<sup>2</sup> Lundgaard, 21-22.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me  
from the body of this death?

But he also knew what it was to die to sin and self and claim the final victory:

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8  
Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the  
righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them  
also that love his appearing.

Four Key Truths

If we want to defeat the evil that lives within us, then we are going to as Paul did,  
agonize in the good fight and be determined to finish the course. When we fight, we  
will wield the same four truths that Paul used in recognizing his enemy. These four  
truths are found in Romans 7:21—

Romans 7:21

I find then a law, that, when I would do good,  
evil is present with me.

So let's look at the first key truth.

- I. Sin, or evil, lives in us as a "law." The "law" Paul refers to is the same thing he calls "sin dwelling in me" in verses 17 and 20, and "evil present with me" in verse 21. This is the *indwelling sin* we are talking about. Why does Paul call it a *law*?

Paul is using a metaphor, or a picture to illustrate the nature of sin. Just like a law, sin has its power, authority, constraints, and control in our lives. Actually, Paul deals with God's Law at the beginning of this chapter, so he is working off of that illustration. He is also using irony here. The point of the first part of the chapter is that God's law ought to rule our lives, yet the law of *sin* seems to win a lot of head-to-head battles. I don't think there is a more stunning contrast. He uses this powerful contrast to reveal sin's deadly force in our lives.

Think about this picture of a law for a moment. A law can be:

- A positive command ("honor your father and mother")
- A negative prohibition ("thou shalt not bear false witness")

In every law there is sowing and reaping— that is there is always a promise and a threat:

- Reward for obedience: "you will live long on the earth" if you honor your parents.
- Threat for disobedience: "The LORD will not hold him guiltless who taketh His name in vain."

We can also think of law in the way we speak of "laws of nature."

- Gravity is a law that bends things in its direction. It perfectly conforms to its "commands." Gravity is not a law as an idea or an outward precept, but 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.
- Thirst

- Sexual drive
- Fear

Each of these laws compels 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, and 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.

If this is the case, then in what sense has Christ defeated sin in the believer?

The answer is that he has:

- Overthrown its rule (2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.) Now we can “put off the old man, and put on the new” (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9-10, “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”)
- Weakened its power (Galatians 5:16 *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*)
- Even killed its root so that it cannot bear the fruit of eternal death (1 Corinthians 15:54 “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”)

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. Our bodies are not redeemed yet, and we still have a rotting corpse of sin strapped to our soul while we are on this earth.

Lundgaard gives an interesting illustration:

Think of your sanctification in terms of Christ’s coming to earth. In his first coming he inaugurated his kingdom in the world: he is already ruling and reigning, he has defeated the god of this age, he is seated on his throne at the right hand of the Father; yet the opposition remains, the battle continues. In his second coming he will consummate his kingdom, ridding it from every enemy. Being born again is the first coming of Christ to your soul: he truly rules and reigns in your heart, but the defeated enemy remains and the battle continues. Your glorification after death is the second coming of Christ to your soul, when every last trace of the law of sin will be disintegrated.<sup>3</sup>

So we’ve learned that the sin, the evil desires within us, works as a law with great force. It’s still around, and it will not be conquered until this body dies. So there is a law of sin. And where is it? That brings us to our second key truth.

- II. 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 from his professors

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 152, endnote number 4.

warning him of sin's power. He sat under the feet of Gamaliel, and had all the head knowledge about sin that any Jew could ever ask for. But in Romans 7:21 ("I find then a law [at work]...within me") he moves from his comfortable state of knowledge to a disheartening realization—the law was at work within *him!*

It is one thing to sit in a group and discuss and critique the doctrine of original sin. It's a whole 'nother story to find yourself dominated by it. It is one thing to listen to and lecture about the flesh eating disease. You may read articles about it, you learn about it. That's one level. It's a whole different realm to be told that it is in you, eating you alive.

Not many understand

Not many people have really understood this "law of sin," not even in our churches. If God's people really got a hold of this, we would hear of it more in our prayers, see more struggle against it in our lives, and see less of its fruit in our actions. When we find that this law is in us, and we fully realize it, we begin to echo with Paul from the very depth of our souls, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

Only Believers can see this working of the law of sin

Believers are the only people to realize that this law of sin is at work in them. Lost people cannot feel it. The law of sin is most definitely at work in unbelievers and believers alike, but lost people are totally dominated by the law of sin. They obey it. It is as if they are in a raging river, and they are carried along by it because they have surrendered themselves to it. A believer, on the other hand, swims upstream—he meets sin head-on and strains under its strength.

So it is clear—there is a law—a force—at work within us. Evil is present with us! And it is at work within us. Paul found this law at work in his soul, and so do we. We find it when we are down, and at our worst, but more than that...

III. We find this law when we're at our best. As powerful as this law of sin is, it doesn't *rule* the heart of the believer. Paul found it at work in him even while *he wanted to do good*. He didn't fall into it during a low time in his spiritual life or during a time that he was lukewarm or indifferent to the things of God. He was aware of its power and work in him even when he most wanted to serve God. It was opposing him even when Christ was ruling in his heart.

Sin's ambushes but never rules!

Though the law of sin works from the inside and ambushes believers at their best, it isn't their dictator. The very fact that they are aware of this law of sin shows that it does not rule in them. Paul says:

- I want to do good (Romans 7:21)
- I want to please God, to give him glory (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- I want to serve his people (2 Corinthians 12:15 And I will very gladly *spend and be spent* for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.)
- I want to honor God (Ephesians 1:3—"Blessed be...God")

By God's grace, the desire to obey the Lord ordinarily prevails in us, even against this insidious, menacing, sinister enemy within. But we can never rest in our obedience and in the constant putting down of our flesh in contriteness and having a broken heart. This fight—this agony—must go on in the Christian constantly. We must never rest. Why? Because...

IV. This law never rests. Since grace rules the believer's heart, he wants to do good. We can describe this desire in two ways:

- First, there is his general and constant desire to please God. (verse 18: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.")
- Second, there are times when the believer has a particular duty in mind. This would be something like:

- ∅ Private prayer
- ∅ Giving a tenth of your income to God

Remember verse 21 "when I would do good." The law of sin opposes both your desire and your particular duties and disciplines of godliness.

#### The Fight of Sin

The "law of sin and death" is in a constant tug of war against the believer's overall desire to please God (verses 14-25). But sin goes further: when the believer sets his mind to do even the simplest duty to God, sin fights him right at that point. For instance you set your heart to pray and read God's word. At that moment the law of sin pushes you to count praying and Bible study worthless. At that time this body of sin would rather do *anything* beside pray and read the Bible. The newspaper, the Internet, a bowl of cereal, the dog needs to be fed, whatever it is—recognize that this is the law of sin at work within you. The law of sin makes us drowsy or distracted when we would pray and stingy and ambitious when we would tithe.

#### Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Don't you sometimes feel like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Every believer who is also a sinner (which is every believer) does.

#### Galatians 5:17

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh:  
and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye  
cannot do the things that ye would.

So we say again with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

#### Wise Up

We are at the beginning of obedience to God. *To understand these four truths* about indwelling sin is *to arm yourself against it!* In your struggle against sin, there is only one thing more important to grasp than these four truths, and that is the free, justifying grace of God in the blood of Christ. Lundgaard make an awesome statement when he says:

The grace of God in Christ and the law of sin are the two fountains of all your holiness and sin, joy and trouble, refreshment and sorrow. If you are to walk with God and glorify him in this world, you need to master both.<sup>4</sup>

Many people live in ignorance about their own hearts. We go to the doctor for regular checkups, we keep our teeth in good shape, we watch our finances; we even watch what we eat and try to jog or exercise regularly to keep our bodies fine tuned. But how many people give the least thought to their souls? If it is important to watch over and care for our bodies and our investments, which will soon die and rot, 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 the wisest thing we can ever do—by living a life aware of the constant evil that is present with us and the grace of God that is always there to rescue us, then and only then can we find out what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:10 “Proving what is acceptable [pleasing] unto the Lord” and then only can we live a life that avoids all things that grieves the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30 “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”)

#### Reflections

- Can you think of ways the law of sin offers rewards for obeying it and threatens punishment for ignoring it?
- Think of a time when you “found” the law of sin in you—when it seemed to take over and mold you to its will—even as it were—against your will.
- If it is true that the law of sin in you and I never rests, what hope do we have?
- Look at these verses...
  - Luke 12:15, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”
  - Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

In light of these verses, describe the daily diligence you need in order to heed Jesus’ warnings.

Conclusion: Let us close in prayer asking God to make us the men that we ought to be!

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 27.