

*Book Review**Diehard Sins: How to Fight Wisely
Against Destructive Daily Habits*

Rush Witt, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2018), 216 pages.



Reviewed by DAVID POWLISON

Sin doesn't die easily. Faith fights the treachery of our own hearts and habits, even while facing the hostilities, hardships, and disappointments that beset us. Hebrews 12:1–2 describes how this challenge finds huge encouragement in Jesus.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

That sentence captures how honest faith enables people to do the hard, right thing while facing hard circumstances. Hebrews 11 had named fifteen persons and described their circumstances, along with citing unnamed "people," "prophets," "women," and "others." All these persevered by faith. Now the attention shifts to us. Those witnesses inspire us to repentance, faith, and action, in the shining light of Jesus' own race of faith. Facing hard circumstances, he did the hard, right thing by faith, and all the promises of God came true. He died for us and for our faith; he lives for us and for our

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faith. You and I need to know him because we have a fight with sin on our hands—a fight within ourselves, a fight in the face of obstacles. Sin stumbles us, distracts us, and causes us to forget. Let's run the race and fight the fight. Let's run with endurance, looking to Jesus.

This is what *Diehard Sins* is about. It is about being a Christian, and about the kind of fight we are in, and about the long haul. It's specifically about how the "little" sin that infiltrates your soul and becomes a daily habit is often the hardest to shake. It's about the hands-on mercies of Jesus, and how we learn to run the race with joy and hope.

Rush Witt focuses on the significance of seemingly little sins—the everyday gossip and unresolved conflict, the laziness and careless words, the irritation and gluttony. Each of these examples (and a half dozen more) is a touchpoint, something that reveals the heart. Each names an actual problem that invites the grace of Christ. This is a book about knowing yourself more accurately, and knowing Jesus Christ more truly. One lovely quality in how Rush Witt takes on sin is that he never gets morbid, grim, scolding, or moralistic. This is a realistic book about sin that delivers a rich measure of joy because the sheer love of God for us is always in view. Christ is for you, he is with you, he will bring you through to share the joy that is his.

This book keeps Jesus Christ refreshingly in view. One of the hardest things in counseling ministry is to communicate *how* relationship with Jesus Christ specifically intersects with personal and interpersonal problems. Christ too easily can become a pietistic pat answer. A yada-yada. A doctrinal category. A cognitive-behavioral truth bit to insert into your self-talk. A religious reference point, perhaps mentioned in passing while we get on to the practical insights, interventions, and action plans that are the real stuff of change. But to know Jesus Christ more deeply and personally is *the* distinctive of biblical counseling worthy of the name. Wisdom knows him. Needs him. Trusts him. Seeks him. Loves him. Fears him. Listens to him. One of the hardest things in counseling is to establish the living connection between troubling human experiences and the only Savior of people in trouble. *Diehard Sins* always keeps the Savior of sinners relevant and knowable.

Witt writes clearly, and his style is easily accessible. For example, in Chapter 4, "The Joy-Filled Fight," he unpacks six huge implications of

grace, each in two or three pithy paragraphs. Here are his headings and my summary:

- *You can face your sin instead of hiding it.* Because Jesus forgives, we are free to be honest.
- *You can own your sin instead of blaming others.* God's fatherly care frees us to take personal responsibility.
- *You can accept your sin instead of making excuses.* We can look honestly at all the complicating circumstances that tempt and try us, while still being free to say, "I do this."
- *You can identify your sin as sin instead of minimizing.* Jesus' willingness to enter our struggle frees us to be accurate.
- *You can acknowledge your sin instead of denying it.* An active conscience becomes a huge blessing when Christ's mercy and care remain in view.
- *You can trust God with your sin instead of despairing.* Mercy triumphs. If the Son sets you free, you are free.

That'll preach! Sin is the deepest, most complex, and most prevalent human problem. It also happens to be the most unpopular and awkward topic in the world. The gospel frees us to name the problem and to talk about reality openly, realistically, and hopefully. A counselor who is unable to talk helpfully about sin is like an oncologist unable to talk about cancer. Rush Witt knows how to talk about sin as a normal topic of an honest, encouraging conversation.

I trust it is clear that I like this book!

In the rest of this review, I will move in a different direction. I will reflect on a question that the book raised for me. My purpose is theological development more than critique. As I have said, pithiness is a strength of the book. But I hope to add a more comprehensive perspective to part of Witt's discussion in Chapter 9. He opens with a poignant case study of a woman named Janet.

Everywhere Janet goes, she feels guilty. Like John Bunyan's Christian pilgrim, she slumps under the weight of her burden. Regardless of what she does or how her friends encourage her, Janet's closest companion is a low-grade feeling of shame. Even when spirits run high at a party that

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