

Good & Evil Are Warring Inside Us Christians!
Sermon on Romans 7:18-25
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther
March 25, 2007

Introduction: A War Is a Generation's Defining Moment

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who are at war...:

War is a tragic consequence of sin. So much is that true that our Lord made wars and rumors of wars officially a sign of Judgment Day. When we hear of a war, we think, "Yeah, that's right: there's still sin in this world—sin for which God will judge the world, and sin from which he'll deliver me."

War is a tragic consequence of sin. Having said that, war is also the defining moment for the generation within which it takes place. It was their united reaction to World War Two which made that generation "The Greatest Generation". The War in Vietnam defined its generation, at least in this country, in a whole different way. And if you're willing to grant that terrorists are at war with us, then there's little doubt that that war will define the present generation.

Now, when you're inside a war, wouldn't it be great to know the war's outcome—I mean, especially if that outcome is favorable toward you? Think of the comfort it would be to know that, when the whole mess is done, you will have won! Some say it's that kind of calm confidence – not to mention that kind of iron will – that sustains a guy like Winston Churchill, or other victorious wartime leaders.

Theme: Good & Evil Are Warring Inside Us Christians

Well, God's Word to us today gives us the report of a war that is going on. In fact, it's a war in which you yourself are closely involved. The first part of God's Word to us today will lay out for us the enemy combatants in this war. The final part of God's Word to us today will announce which side will ultimately be victorious.

Part One: The Battle Is Between the Old Adam & the New Man

God's Word to us today is Romans, chapter seven, verses eighteen through twenty-five. It's on the first inside page of the bulletin, if you'd like to follow along—and I'd certainly encourage you to do so today.

Writing this section of Scripture today, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the Apostle Paul. And this is not the young Apostle Paul, back when he had barely finished being that Christian-killer Saul. No, this is an entirely mature Apostle Paul—who had seen the risen Christ, who had learned personally from Jesus, who had spent more than a decade already in the Christian apostolic ministry, and who had written multiple letters inspired by God the Holy Spirit.

Yet, that Apostle Paul describes a war inside himself. And it's the same war that's going on inside of you—at least, if you're a Christian. I'm going to read all of verses eighteen through twenty-three. And as I do so, see if you can pick out the enemy combatants in this war—and some of their characteristics, too. Paul writes to the Christians at Rome—and also to me and to you...:

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

So, first of all, surely you caught that there's a war going on here. In that last verse, it says: there's a war being waged, and there is even a prisoner in this war. So, this battle is indeed war....

Secondly, did you catch the battlefield for this war? The battlefield is Paul's heart. That's where the war is being waged. And the same war is going on in the heart of every Christian.

Finally, did you catch who the combatants were in this war? You have Paul's old sinful nature versus what Paul would call his real self. Elsewhere in the Bible, they're called the Old Adam and the New Man. And we need to talk about them for a minute....

The Old Adam is the old sinful nature which we inherited, as the name says, from Adam. It's as if, as soon as Adam fell into sin, a genetic corruption took place in him. And chromosomally his sinfulness passed down genetically to his children, and their sinfulness to theirs, right on down to us, and from us to our children.

This sinful nature was with us from the moment we became "us", from the moment we were conceived. This sinful nature will be with us until the moment we die, as well. Every single human being alive has that sinful nature. And every single human being has had that sinful nature—with the exception of Jesus Christ, who did not inherit it.

That sinful nature, that Old Adam, is utterly corrupt. It cannot desire what God desires; in fact, it always desires the very opposite. It cannot think, say, or do anything according to God's will; in fact, the sinful nature always thinks, says, and does the very opposite. And that makes the old sinful nature utterly, utterly damnable.

On the other hand, the New Man also dwells inside of us. We inherited the New Man from our new and Heavenly Father. When he gave us new birth through Holy Baptism, we inherited from him a whole new nature. That's the real "us"—even eternally. And that new nature is perfectly righteous. It desires what God desires. It thinks, says, and does whatever God wants it to think, say, and do.

And so, there's a battle going on within us.... There's no battle going on inside those who are not Christians. They are completely controlled by their Old Adam. It says, "Lust!" and they lust; it says, "Hate!" and they hate; it says, "Rebel!" and they rebel. Even if they are doing outwardly good things – and thank God: that happens sometimes – let's say a non-Christian gives a nice sum of money to a worthy charity, it's because their Old Adam is saying, "This will make you look good," or, "This will make you feel less guilty," or, "This will come back to benefit you sometime," or even, "This will earn you favor with God."

But in contrast, there's a battle going on within us Christians. Every turn we take, every step of the way, every situation we confront, every decision we make, our Old Adam is hollering, "Lust! Hate! Rebel!" and our New Man is insisting, "Be pure! Love! Obey!"

Part Two: The Victory Is Ours Through Jesus Christ

Now, war like this is not comfortable! It's uncomfortable fighting all the time. It's uncomfortable denying yourself the supposed "pleasures" in life—just as it was uncomfortable for the greatest generation to live under both military subsistence and national rationing. It's uncomfortable seeing yourself lose some battles—just as it is uncomfortable waking up each morning to hear that somebody new has died in war overseas.

And it gets to a point where a person is inclined to ask, "Is it worth it? I mean: The going is tough, the enemy is strong—and who knows if we can even win this war?" The Apostle Paul understood that about the war inside himself. That's why he said: **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**

It makes a guy wish he had a secret weapon—you know, sort of like the atomic bomb in World War Two. A weapon like that is the sort of thing that, deployed correctly, finally trumps everything else, finally answers all questions, and draws the war to a very certain and triumphant conclusion.

Brothers and sisters, we have that weapon. Paul declares it to us – Paul declares him to us! – in the last nine words of God's Word to us today. He has asked: *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from the this body of death?* And he answers: **Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

See: Jesus is our ultimate weapon, who trumps everything else and answers all questions. Jesus settles the war within us and wins our victory!

It's Jesus who has atomized our sinful nature, rendering it powerless. The Apostle Paul writes elsewhere: *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

And so, once again this Lenten Season, we have seen Jesus accept upon himself the crushing weight of our sinful nature with all its sins and sinfulness—in Gethsemane. We have heard Jesus accept upon himself the crushing guilt of our sinful nature—during his trials. And soon, we will feel Jesus accept upon himself the hellish pain earned by our sinful nature—on the cross.

But once again, he will win the victory. Of that you can be sure! Easter morning is proof: that Jesus left our sins buried in his tomb—crucified away, by God's grace!

Conclusion: This War Is Your Defining Moment

So, this battle you've got going on inside of you – between your old sinful nature and the new nature which is the real you – you are going to win this war! On the day of your death, Jesus will liberate you entirely from your sinful nature. On the day of your death, your new nature will take you over entirely. And you will always – in heavenly glory – desire, think, speak, do, and accomplish what you have always really wanted: according to God's will, and for Jesus sake!

So, I ask you: Is it time now to quit the war? No!!! Take it to the enemy – in hand-to-hand combat on land – always acting lovingly and obediently! Take it to the enemy – by battle on the sea – always speaking truly and purely! Take it to the enemy – by attack in the air – always desiring what your commanding officer, your Heavenly Father, wants.

Yes, you will lose some battles along the way. But be confident and calm! Your victory in the end is sure. You have Christ Jesus on board with you, and with him no mission can ever finally fail! Amen.

Jesus was delivered to death for our sins, and raised to life because of our justification. Amen.