

INTRODUCTION

Today is Mother's Day, so if your mother is still around, I encourage you to tell her how much you love and appreciate her. I recently came across a list of different things our mothers taught us.

1. My mother taught me PRAYER: "You better pray that stain will come out of the carpet."
2. My mother taught me LOGIC: "Because I said so, that's why."
3. My mother taught me FORESIGHT: "Always wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."
4. My mother taught me IRONY: "Keep crying, and I'll give you something to cry about."
5. My mother taught me about the science of OSMOSIS: "Shut your mouth and eat your supper."
6. My mother taught about me the CIRCLE OF LIFE: "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."
7. My mother taught me about ANTICIPATION: "Just wait until we get home."
8. My mother taught me MEDICAL SCIENCE: "If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they're going to get stuck that way."
9. My mother taught me HUMOR: "When that lawnmower cuts off your leg, don't come running to me."
10. My mother taught me about JUSTICE: "One day you'll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you!"
11. BUT MOSTLY...My mother taught me about LOVE... 'Cause that's what mothers do best!

From 1861 until 1865, America was torn apart by the bloodiest war in our history. We call it the Civil War, but there was nothing civil about it. In fact, the term "civil war" is an oxymoron. The War Between the States was an uncivil war in which over 650,000 Americans were killed. That's more deaths than World War I and World War II combined (622,000 Americans died in the two world wars). It's a miracle of God that our nation even survived that terrible war. In this message I want to talk about another war—it's an inner war, and it's not very civil either. It's the war that rages between your two natures. Each of us has a sinful nature, we simply call it human nature. When we become a follower of Jesus, God places His Holy Spirit in our hearts, and the war begins. Our sinful nature is always pushing us toward sin, and the Holy Spirit is prompting us toward holy living.

There are many passages in the Bible that address this inner struggle. Let's read one of the most important ones found in Galatians 5:16-23:

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this

will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Even people who aren’t Christians sometimes struggle with right and wrong. In movies this struggle has often be pictured as a person with a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other soldier. The devil whispers, “Go ahead. Just do it!” The angel counters with, “No, don’t do it!” You don’t have an angel or a devil on your shoulder, but God has equipped each person with a sense of right and wrong. It’s called a conscience. It’s one of the greatest proofs that there is a Creator. How else would we know instinctively that killing another person is wrong unless a higher power placed that instinct in us?

A conscience is like an inner compass that points people toward true North—good. And some people say, “Just let your conscience be your guide.” That’s actually one of the chapters in my book, *No! That’s NOT in the Bible*. Your conscience can be your guide ONLY if it leads you to Jesus. A compass becomes useless if you put a magnet near it. And a person without Christ has a faulty conscience. That’s why they can get to a point where they sin without any sense of remorse.

But even when you come to Christ, this struggle isn’t over. The difference is we have a supernatural resource to transform our conscience. In this message I want to talk about this inner struggle between right and wrong. Here are three truths that will set you free to have victory in your inner uncivil war.

I. REALIZE WE ARE ENGAGED IN DAILY WARFARE

The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground. Too many Christians have gone AWOL—not absent without leave, but absent without love. The whole topic of spiritual warfare is broad and I have a full series from Ephesians 6 called “Battle Stations!”

In World War II, the Allied forces were fighting one enemy, but we sent troops to the African front, the European front, and the Pacific front. In much the same way, spiritual warfare involves fighting one enemy on three fronts: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Since this message is about defeating the flesh, the inner sinful nature, let’s put it in context.

A. We battle the external enemy: the world

In 1 John 2:15 we are encouraged, “Do not love the world or anything in the world.” This isn’t talking about the world of people. In fact, God so loved the world of people that He gave His only begotten Son to save the world. The world represents all the allure of humanity without God. 1 John 2:16 identifies the world as “the lust of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life.” Jesus said we aren’t to isolate ourselves from the world. He has sent us into the world to win the world.

The call of the world is to conform to be like everyone else. Remember, when we used to say, “But mom, everybody is doing it!”? Her answer was, “If everyone jumps off a cliff would you

follow?” The world without Christ is headed toward hell on an eight-lane highway, the whole time they are trying to get us to model our lives after them.

One of my favorite American presidents was Calvin Coolidge, whose nickname was “Silent Cal” because he didn’t talk much. Once there was a formal dinner at the White House and Silent Cal was at the head of the table. Dignitaries were seated down each side of the table. At the end of the meal, when coffee was served, President Coolidge did something that surprised the guests. He poured some of his coffee into his saucer and blew on it to cool it. Then he added some sugar and milk to the coffee. It was considered uncouth to pour coffee into a saucer, but since the President was doing it, everyone else at the table followed his example and poured their coffee into their saucers. You can imagine their consternation when suddenly he bent over and put it on the floor for his cat! Don’t imitate the world!

B. We battle the infernal enemy: the devil

The word “infernal” means diabolical or wicked. Since the time Satan slithered into the Garden of Eden, he has been tempting people to rebel against God. Satan tempts us to give in to the call of the wealth and pleasures of the world. He even took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him wealth and fame and promised to give it to Him if He would only bow down to him.

Satan isn’t a lesser god. He isn’t all-knowing, all-powerful, and he isn’t omnipresent. Those are attributes that belong only to God. Satan is a fallen angel with an organized, demonized army whose only job is to keep people away from God’s plan for their lives.

C. We battle the internal enemy: the flesh

Someone said the world is the temptation; the devil is the tempter; and our flesh is the tempted. When I was a teenager, comedian Flip Wilson had a famous phrase, “The devil made me do it!” The truth is the devil can’t MAKE you do anything. He only appeals to your sinful nature. As powerful as the devil is, and as tempting as the world can be, those enemies have no power over you, unless you give them permission.

Once there was a jewelry shop robbery. The police investigation determined the door hadn’t been broken, and the display cases were intact. Upon further investigation they discovered an employee of the jewelry store had given the crooks keys to the front door and the display cases. He had even provided the alarm code. That kind of robbery is called an inside job. The criminal on the inside let the other two criminals in.

My friend, Ron Dunn, used to say sin is an inside job. When you sin, don’t blame the world, and don’t blame the devil. It was your sinful nature that gave the keys to the world and the devil. The Bible says, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” (James 1:13-14) So, once you learn to have victory over your sinful nature, it is the key to having victory over the world and the devil as well.

Through the years I’ve had people come to me distraught over the fact that they are still struggling with sin. They are sure they have lost their salvation. I often tell them the very fact that they ARE struggling with sin is a sign they are saved.

I agree with John Piper who wrote: “A Christian is not a person who experiences no bad desires. A Christian is a person who is at war with those desires. Conflict in your soul is not all bad. There is something worse than the war within between flesh and Spirit—namely, no war within because the flesh controls the citadel and all the outposts. Praise God for the war within! The Spirit has landed to do battle with the flesh. So take heart if your soul feels like a battlefield at times. The sign of whether you are indwelt by the Spirit is not that you have no bad desires, but that you are at war with them!”

II. CHOOSE WHICH OF YOUR TWO NATURES CONTROLS YOU

Several of my friends lost their lives in the Vietnam War. Some people said Vietnam was an unwinnable war. You may disagree, but I think the only reason it was unwinnable was because the politicians wouldn’t let our military win it. When it comes to this inner uncivil war, I have some good news. It is a winnable war. Part of the freedom we have in Christ is the freedom to choose which nature controls us.

One of the verses we used to memorize in MasterLife was from Romans 6. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:12-14)

The truth is our old sinful nature never changes. It can’t be reformed or redeemed. God spoke these words to Cain, the first murderer in the Bible. He said, “Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:7) Jeremiah understood the depravity of the human heart when he wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

The great English Baptist Pastor, Charles Spurgeon wrote this warning about trusting your heart: “You may rest assured that the heart is never other than it originally was; the evil nature is still evil. A volcano is ever a volcano; even when it sleeps, trust it not. A lion is a lion, even though he plays like a kid. My heart, even though for an hour, it may not have had an evil thought, is still evil. If it were possible that I could live for days without a single temptation from my own heart to sin, it would be still just as evil as it was before.”

There’s an old preacher story about our two inner natures that you’ve probably heard, but I want to repeat it, because it’s still the best way to help you understand your choice about sin. A Native American was led to Christ by a traveling missionary. When the missionary returned, he asked how the new Christian was doing. The Native American described the inner battle between right and wrong. He said it was as if two dogs were fighting inside his heart. A mean dog wanted him to do wrong, and a good dog wanted him to do the right thing. The missionary asked the

question, “Which dog wins the battle?” The Native American thought for a moment and said with great wisdom, “The one I feed the most.”

You have a choice. You can starve your old sinful nature and feed your new nature. Let me get specific. Guys, you have a choice between watching porn or reading God’s Word. One is feeding your sinful nature, and the other feeds your new Jesus-nature. Ladies, you can go out and spend money on things you don’t really need, and feel good about it, or you can donate your money and time to help people who are struggling. One feeds your sin nature, and the other feeds your new Jesus nature. Students, you can go online and download a term paper, or you can dig in and write it yourself. One feeds your sin nature, and one feeds your Jesus nature. Starve the flesh, and feed the Spirit!

I love the way God illustrates spiritual truth in nature. We’ve all heard of a cuckoo bird (mostly from the commercial “I’m cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs.”) The European Cuckoo is called a brood parasite. In other words, the mother bird never builds a nest. Instead she finds a nest already built and when the builder bird is away, she flies into the nest and lays her egg. The other mother bird returns and sees a much larger egg beside her own. Maybe her bird-brain wonders for a second, “What’s up with that?” But her motherly instinct takes over and she hatches it like one of her own. The only problem is that the cuckoo chick is much larger than her own baby birds. When she returns with food, guess who gets fed? Eventually the other baby birds die, or the cuckoo pushes them from the nest. And one of the strangest sights of nature can be seen when the smaller mother bird continues to feed the baby cuckoo who is now several times larger than the mother who has unwillingly adopted the big bird.

The cuckoo bird is like our sin nature. If you keep feeding it, it will take over. But you have the choice. You can starve your flesh and feed the spirit. The choice is yours.

III. WHEN YOU SURRENDER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, YOU CAN DEFEAT SIN

Sin is a battle of two wills. Your human nature wills you to sin, but the Holy Spirit wills you to live holy. We can overcome sin when we constantly pray like Jesus, “Not MY will, but YOURS be done.”

There’s a little secret in the Bible many Christians have overlooked. Not only can God give you the POWER to overcome sin, if you ask Him, He will also give you the WILL to overcome sin. The Bible says, “For it is God who works in [not WITH you or FOR you, but IN you] you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13) So, we can appropriate God’s power and God’s will—that’s what I call *willpower*!

In Romans 8, Paul said there are two competing “laws” operating in our lives. These two competing laws are the law of sin and the law of the Spirit. These aren’t laws like legal rules. These are principles, like the law of gravity. But the law of gravity can be conquered by the law of aerodynamics. Every time you ride in an airplane you’re defying the law of gravity and flying above its effects. That principle could be stated this way: “Ride in an airplane and you will not succumb to the pull of gravity.” The same is true of sin. We all struggle with the gravity of

depravity, but the Bible says, "Live in the Spirit and you will not gratify the cravings of the sinful nature."

The students of Aristotle were first called "peripatetics" because of his habit of walking and teaching at the same time, a method Jesus used. As the teacher walked, the students followed where he led and they learned in the process. In Galatians 5:16 Paul used that exact word, *peripateo*, as a command for Christians. The King James Version says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

Walking in the Spirit is a growing experience. We should be getting better at it the longer we do it. If you're a parent do you remember when your children were first learning to walk? Until they're about 10-12 months old, they are operating under the old law of crawling around on the floor. But then they decide to operate under a new law of walking. So usually, Mom or Dad will get down on their knees and the other parent will hold the child and they'll say, "Come to Daddy! Come to Mama!" And have you ever noticed when the child takes his or first steps how excited they are? They have this big grin on their faces. They look like a little Frankenstein walking because they walk so stiff-legged! I don't know of any child anywhere who could walk perfectly the first time. Most children take a couple of steps and then fall. Now when that child falls, the parents didn't say, "You sorry loser! You're such a failure! You'll never walk!" No, of course you don't do that. You pick them up and say, "Good job! Let's try it again." In the beginning, the child will fall more than they walk. But hopefully as they proceed, they'll walk more than they fall. The Christian life is a growing experience and you may fall some, especially at the beginning, but as you grow spiritually, you're going to walk more than you'll fall!

The secret of victory is to be led by the Spirit. John Piper wrote: "The Spirit is not a leader like the pace car in the Daytona 500. He is a leader like a locomotive on a train. We do not follow in our strength. We are led by his power. So 'walk by the Spirit' means stay hooked up to the divine source of power and go wherever he leads."

CONCLUSION

As a Bible teacher, I'm always searching for ways to make Bible truths easy to understand. So, let me illustrate this war between our two natures by telling you about our cat. Well, actually, it's my wife's cat. I just tolerate the cat. Years ago a church member gave us a kitten and said it was a female, so Cindy named her Myrtle Mae. However, upon the first visit to the Vet, we were told that Myrtle Mae was a male cat. But rather than change the name, we just kept calling him Myrtle Mae. Myrtle Mae is like the boy named Sue, so I understand why she...I mean, he, has some issues.

Myrtle Mae is an indoor/outdoor cat. My job in life is to be the automatic door opener for Myrtle Mae. That cat controls me. When he wants to go out, he stands at the door and speaks. It's really not a sweet "meow" as much as it is a harsh "raaar." He will stand at the door and raaar until someone opens the door for him. If he doesn't get service fast enough, he will even climb the stairs to my study and look and me utter a louder rarer, which means, "You dummy. What are you doing that is more important than opening the door for me?" He stays out most nights, and

when I get up early in the morning, he’s at the back door. Raaar! Then after he has eaten, he is ready to go outside again—raaar! And then he wants back in—raaar!

Even when the cat isn’t at the door, I sometimes think I hear a raaar, and I’ll go check. A few weeks ago we boarded Myrtle Mae for a few days while we visited our daughter in Seattle. On the morning we left I was certain I could still hear the raaar at the back door! I confess I sometimes live in bondage to the raaar. The cat controls me, but sometimes I control the cat. I know his routine, so sometimes I’ll often put him out just so I don’t have to hear the rarer.

But I’ve discovered something about my slavery to Myrtle Mae. Whenever I get in my car and drive away to come to my office at church, I no longer hear the raaar. When I vacate the premises Myrtle Mae no longer has any control over me.

My sin nature is like Myrtle Mae. It’s always there calling attention to itself raaar. There’s a conflict. Sometimes I control the cat and sometimes the cat controls me. But the only time the raaar of my sin nature is silenced is when I practice Galatians 2:20 and vacate the premises. I confess, “I [the sinful nature] am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live. But not I [the sinful nature]. Christ lives in me! And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” (21st Century KJV)

In those moments in which I have vacated the control of my will to Jesus, the raaar is silenced. But this surrender to the Spirit isn’t just something you do once a day, like taking a shower. It’s something we must do every hour, every minute, and sometimes every few seconds.

It would be nice if we could take a daily holiness pill, and all day long we would be pure and holy. But God doesn’t deal with us in the scope of years or days. He desires to walk with us step by step, moment by moment. That is why we must depend on His grace and His power every single moment of every single day.

Barbara Ryberg has captured this truth in her little poem, “Step by Step.” “He does not lead me year by year; Nor even day by day, But step-by- step my path unfolds; The Lord directs my way. Tomorrow’s plans I do not know, I only know this minute; But He will say, “This is the way, By faith now you walk in it.” And I am glad that it is so, Today’s enough to bear; And when tomorrow comes, His grace; Shall far exceed its care. What need to worry then, or fret? The God who gave His Son, Holds all my moments in His hand; And gives them, one by one.”

You don’t have to let the cat control you. You can control the cat. When you surrender to the Holy Spirit Who lives in you CAN win the inner uncivil war!

OUTLINE

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B. The infernal enemy: the devil

C. The internal enemy: the flesh

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James 1:13-14

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"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." *Romans 6:12-14*

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"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes