

The Christian's Conflict with Himself.

Text: Rom 7:18-8:4

1) Is A Fierce Conflict

Suggested Hymns:

2) Is Not A Hopeless One

352, 452, 353, 839T320, 324

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 7:18–8:4, *¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*

²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Christians are enviable people. They are brothers and sisters of the King of kings and of the Lord of lords, so that, whenever an unpleasant situation arises, all they need do is to cast their cares upon Him.

Christians are sons and daughters of the almighty and benevolent God and Father in heaven and for that reason at all times, especially, however, in times of sickness, poverty, and distress, joyfully exclaim, as it is written in Romans 8:32, ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

But let us not imagine that the lives of Christians are an endless round of joy. No; Christians also have their troubles and their conflicts. They have the devil to contend with. We read in Ephesians 6:12, ¹² *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

They must be on their guard lest the children of this world deceive them and seduce them into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and wickedness.¹ However, the fiercest fights that Christians must engage in are their conflicts with their own sinful corrupt selves. Also from these conflicts the Christian will come out victorious if he fights in the right manner. Let us consider, *The Christian's Conflict with Himself*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Christian's Conflict With Himself Is A Fierce Conflict

If there ever was a faithful and grateful believer in Christ Jesus, it was Paul, the author of our text. He was scourged, he was imprisoned, he was stoned;² but nothing was able to shake his faith in his Saviour.

Still there was one thing about his person which made the apostle utterly dissatisfied with himself. He says in our text, ¹⁸ *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

He here makes a distinction between his better and his corrupt self, between the new man which was wrought in him at the time of his conversion and since then daily, and the Old Adam, the old sinful nature, which he received at birth.

Of the latter he says by divine revelation that no good thing dwells in him; no, not even now, since he has been regenerated.

That is the sad complaint of all true Christians: “*in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.*” To this Luther held, although the learned Erasmus tried to convince him otherwise, and many of the Church Fathers maintained a different view.

It is one of the great truths vigorously defended by our dear Lutheran Church. For, if in the flesh of such a staunch believer as the Apostle St. Paul no good thing dwelt, surely there can be no good thing in ours.

Paul finds this flesh the source and cause of a great conflict within himself. To will is present with him (v. 18b). He delights in the Law of God after the inward man (v. 22). He wants to do good (v. 19). He wants to refrain from all that is evil (v. 20).

To his inward man not only the knowledge of God’s will revealed in the Ten Commandments but also the performance of this will is a pleasure.

However, owing to the presence of the flesh he is never able to enjoy the full measure of this pleasure. The doing of those things in which he delights he does not find (v. 18c). On the contrary, the evil which he abhors he does (v. 19). What is the result? A fierce conflict, a war.

The apostle according to the inward man tries to overcome and subdue the flesh; but the flesh won’t have it. It wars against the efforts of the new man and only too often succeeds in causing him to do its bidding.

But when the apostle complains of not doing what he wants to do and of doing what he does not want to do, we must not imagine that he is entirely governed by the forces of evil within himself. No; the very fact that he complains of this shows that he has progressed far in the work of sanctification and that in reality he is governed by the new man.

His utter disgust with his sinful flesh is fully brought out in the words ²⁴ ***O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?***

Paul’s experience is the experience of every true Christian. Christians the world over still possess the sinful flesh inherited from their parents. We read in

John 3:6, ⁶ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

But in their regeneration a new man has also been born in them. The old sinful flesh delights in the transgressions of God's holy Law. The new man finds pleasure in keeping this Law. Since each of the two is determined to gain the upper hand, a conflict is inevitable. This conflict never ends so long as the Christian is in the Church Militant.

Do not all of you who are true believers in the merits of Christ Jesus find it so? Are not your greatest troubles the troubles you have with yourselves, the troubles of not being able fully to subdue your sinful flesh?

Indeed. You, too, have all reason to cry as did Paul from the bottom of your heart: ²⁴ *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* But do not despair; for although it is a fierce struggle in which you are engaged, it is not a hopeless one.

2. The Christian's Conflict With Himself Is Not A Hopeless One

Having viewed his own natural depravity and noted the conflict between the new man and the flesh, Paul now directs our attention to Christ, our only Hope of eternal salvation. He says ¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

Even the regenerate cannot save themselves, for they cannot fully overcome their sinful flesh. But this does not necessarily mean that they are going to be damned. No; Christ has redeemed them also from their original sin. Because of His work of redemption there is now no sentence of condemnation in those who believe in Christ.

By faith they have put on Christ, have clothed themselves in His righteousness. His blood covers both their original depravity and their actual sins. God sees nothing in them worthy of damnation. Thus through the merits of Christ Jesus they have been *made free from the law of sin and death*. The Law has lost its claim on those who believe.

That is due to Christ. He, by suffering and dying as all men's Substitute and keeping the Law perfectly in our stead, has procured the righteousness which the Law demanded but was unable to give.³ In that righteousness lies Paul's hope of winning the conflict against his sinful flesh.

The righteousness of Christ is the sure hope of every Christian. No matter how hard he may try to overcome his sinful flesh, it is impossible for him fully to subdue it. But what man is unable to do Christ has done for him. He has atoned also for the depravity of our human nature, for our original sin.

Hence, although we will never, as long as we live, be able to overcome our sinful flesh fully and completely, and although we will always fail to do those things which according to the new man we would like to do, but instead always do those things from which we would like to refrain, - we need not lose hope; for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.⁴

Remember this, all of us are not as successful in our fight against our own sinful flesh as we should be. Therefore, fight the good fight of faith and never give up.

But if you do not fully succeed, do not lose courage; for as we read in our text, *¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

So in summary, the new self delights in the law of God and wants to do God's will. But sin keeps getting in the way and spoiling the Christian's best efforts. It is a terrible frustration, one that makes Christians totally miserable. With St. Paul we cry out, "²⁴ *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"

But for us, as for St. Paul, there is a solution to the problem. It is the forgiveness of sin earned by Christ's perfect sacrifice. As one who trusts that promise of full and free forgiveness, St. Paul exclaims, "²⁵ *I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,⁵

Holy Father, Thou hast taught me
I should live to Thee alone:
Year by year Thy hand hath brought me

On through dangers oft unknown:
When I wandered, Thou hast found me;
When I doubted, sent me light;
Still Thine arm has been around me,
All my paths were in Thy sight. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 John 2:15-16; 2 Cor. 6:14-18

² 2 Cor. 11:25-27

³ v. 3

⁴ 1 John 1:7

⁵ Hymn 353 v 1