

*Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, March 16, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.*

Title: Winning the Battle Inside Me (The Invisible War Series Part 1)

This morning, we are beginning a new sermon series titled "The Invisible War." As the title suggests, our battle is invisible. We cannot see what is happening with our physical eyes, though we may witness the consequences of this battle in our own lives and the lives of those we love. From a spiritual perspective, there are three main enemies we need to be aware of. The Bible refers to them as the flesh, the world, and the devil. The first battle is within us, due to our own sinful nature. The second battle is around us, in the world we live in and the culture that influences us. The third battle is the attack from Satan, the devil.

In our text for today, the Apostle Paul explains the first enemy and illustrates it with an example of his own inner struggle. Whether we admit or not, you and I are often our own worst enemies. We are our biggest obstacles. Paul identifies six consequences of this inner invisible war and offers solutions for how we can overcome them. This morning, I want us to explore this first spiritual battle taking place inside of us and apply sacred lessons to our faith journey.

Before we go any further, let me remind you of the Apostle Paul, the author of this epistle. Paul wrote many epistles in the New Testament, including this powerful letter to the Roman believers. He was well-educated in religious matters, having been trained as a Pharisee, a spiritual elite. One of the titles he was given was "a Hebrew of Hebrews." This expression, I believe, could be used for someone chosen as "Person of the Year" due to their outstanding contributions to the community. Paul was especially "eager for righteousness based on the law" (Philippians 3:6). As a Pharisee and spiritual leader, Paul knew a lot of religious principles, applied them to his daily life, and sought to be righteous before God. He seemed to almost perfect in his efforts, but even he faced his own inner struggles and fought these battles time and again.

Today, I want us to reflect on Paul's emotional struggles and internal battles he faced. These struggles are not unique to him; we can identify with them in our own lives.

Firstly, Paul experienced confusion when he tried to fight the inner conflict on his own. He said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15). Did you notice that Paul uses the first-person pronoun "I" six times in this verse? If you carefully read all of Romans chapter 7, you will find that Paul uses various forms of the first-person pronoun—"I," "myself," "me," and "my,"—a total of 41 times. This suggests that Paul had an "I" problem. Whether we admit it or not, you have an "I" problem too. The inner struggles we face often arise from trying to do things our own way, on our own. Even Paul, known as a mature follower of Christ, did not always understand himself...

Secondly, Paul experienced guilt when he did not know how to fight the spiritual battle within himself. He said, "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me" (Romans 7:16). Paul knew that what he was doing was wrong, but he also knew that God's law was good. Because

of the sin living inside him, Paul carried a great deal of shame. His spirit was willing to do good, but his flesh was weak. Like Paul, I've been there, feeling guilty and ashamed because my willingness to do right didn't align with the wrong choices I made.

Thirdly, Paul had compulsions when he did not know how to win the battle within himself. What is a compulsion? It is a habitual, wrong activity that becomes a pattern in our lives. Eventually, it becomes a habit, and when we continue in this habit, it turns into an addiction. Paul said, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but 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" (Romans 7:19-20). Paul confessed that although he deeply desired to do right, he kept doing what was wrong due to his sinful nature.

In Genesis chapter 6, when humanity began to increase in number on the earth, God saw how wicked people had become in their hearts, and the author of Genesis wrote, "Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:6). In our passage today, Paul reflects on his sinful nature, using the image of slavery: "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin" (Romans 7:14). Paul tried to walk away from the things he did not want to do, but he found himself still doing them. Addiction, or spiritual bondage, is described in these terms: "the stronghold," or simply "sin." No one in this sanctuary or watching via Zoom, is immune to this spiritual bondage called compulsion or addiction. One way or another, we've all done things we are ashamed of. Addiction is not just physical or emotional; it is also spiritual. On our own, we cannot escape it. In fact, the more we try to break free, the more we find ourselves stuck. Sin has a powerful attraction and influence on us. Confusion, guilt or shame, and compulsion or addiction can lead us to the next consequence when we don't know how to defeat our spiritual battle.

Fourthly, Paul had self-condemnation because he kept stumbling in the same area again and again. He said, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18). Do we know who told Paul that good things did not reside in him? No one else but Paul himself. He was condemning himself, putting himself down. I believe that self-condemnation is one of the main symptoms when we develop wrong habits and repeatedly fail in certain areas.

In a previous sermon series, Time to Dream, I believe that many of us made resolutions to fulfill our God-given dreams and visions. How are we doing with those decisions? Do we feel down because of things we have not done well in the past? The Bible says, "For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes" (Proverbs 24:16). The difference between the righteous and the wicked is not whether we face setbacks, but whether we get back up after falling. When we live before God with repentant hearts and sincere trust, the Lord provides resilience and perseverance to keep moving forward, no matter the challenges we face today or in the future. One of the primary tactics Satan uses to attack us is to constantly fire his invisible arrows of confusion, shame, guilt, compulsion, and condemnation.

This leads us to the fifth consequence of the spiritual battle, which is frustration. Paul said, "Although 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 me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (Romans 7:21-23).

Frustration is another huge result when we fight this invisible war using only our willpower. According to the Book of Revelation, our divine adversary Satan has seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 12:3). Can we imagine such a powerful, evil force? The devil is wicked, corrupt, and powerful, and on our own, we cannot defeat him or his demonic forces.

I want to share a children's story called Cookies, from Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel... Are we familiar with this type of struggle? How many times have we played Frog and Toad with something we promised ourselves, "I'm not going to do it anymore..." and then, we do it anyway? This is frustration. And it eventually leads us to the last consequence we face when we do not know how to win the spiritual battle within ourselves.

Sixthly, Paul felt discouragement in the war taking place within himself. Once again, whether we admit it or not, each of us faces our own spiritual bondage. To win this invisible battle, we need to understand the status of our spiritual enemy. Even the Apostle Paul, despite his vast spiritual knowledge and discipline, was lost in this battle when he tried to fight it on his own. He cried out in despair, "What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). Can we hear the despair in Paul's voice?

There are two common theories regarding human nature. One is called the "theory of goodness," which suggest that humans are born with "an innate goodness." As children, we are pure and innocent, but as we grow older, we become corrupted by external influences. The other theory, the "theory of evilness," describes that humans are inherently evil from the start. Even babies, for example, are naturally selfish and greedy. According to this theory, education and discipline are needed to make us better. I believe both of these theories touch on the truth of human nature.

From a biblical perspective, we can see human nature as a combination of both good and evil. Before the fall of Adam and Eve, humans sought goodness; after the fall, however, we began to pursue evil. Since then, we have inherited a "fallen nature," or what the Bible calls "sin," which causes us to naturally gravitate toward wrongdoing and resist doing what is right. In other words, because of our sinful and selfish desires, we tend to do what is easy and avoid doing what is good.

How many of us have started a day by praying, "Lord, today is going to be different. I'm going to break this bad habit. I'm not going to do this or that"? And then by the end of the day, we realize that we haven't changed at all? Paul is simply admitting here that he has a sinful nature inside of him that leads him to do wrong doings. Again, Paul describes his state of mind: "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). Does this sound familiar? We have two natures within us: the old nature we were born with, and the new nature given to us when we repent of our sins and place our trust in Christ. These two natures are in constant conflict with each other.

Do you know when this spiritual warfare will end? There will be no ending point for this battle on earth. That is why the Apostle Paul encourages us to fight "the good fight of faith" until we are called to be with the Lord in Heaven. Even though we were created in God's image and given His sacred characteristics, our old nature is still alive. That is why

Christ commanded His disciples to “deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him” (Matthew 16:24).

...Once again, our willpower alone is not enough to defeat our old nature. Consider the Apostle Paul, the author of this epistle. Imagine how much willpower he had. Despite his deep religious background and spiritual discipline, Paul was still struggling with the inner battle and crying out to God because he found himself constantly defeated. How did Paul overcome this invisible war and become a conqueror?

I want to conclude this sermon by sharing the solution Paul gives in this scripture. In verse 25, Paul says, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). Paul was not only thanking God for his salvation through Jesus, but also for the Lordship of Christ in his life. Paul placed his trust in Jesus and surrendered to His leadership, allowing Jesus to be the Lord of his life. Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords, has all power in heaven and on earth. Paul acknowledged that it was only through Jesus Christ that he could be freed from all the bondages that had trapped him.

That is why Paul later declares confidently, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul understood that only Jesus Christ could free him from the struggles and bondages of his sinful nature. And Paul thanked God for what Jesus had done for him through the cross and resurrection.

That is why we must deepen our relationship with Christ and depend on His attributes. To win the inner battle, we need to ask Christ to control our thoughts, words, and actions in our daily walk with Him. Asking Christ to lead us is not just a one-time event on Sundays; it is an ongoing request. We need to continually ask the Lord to help us to think with His mind, see with His eyes, hear with His ears, and do with His hands and feet what He wants us to do in our divine adventure.

Let us ask ourselves again: whose identity do we have—our own, or Christ’s? Are we crucified with Christ, or are we still trying to please God and ourselves by our own strength? We must be aware of our true identity in Christ. We have been crucified with Jesus Christ, and we no longer live for ourselves. Christ lives in us. He lives in us 24/7!

Remember: the only way to win the unseen battle against the old nature is to stop trying to do it on our own. We must let Jesus Christ, as the Lord, do it. And He can live through us once we allow His Spirit to empower us with new life.

*\*In preparing this sermon, I have been inspired by Rick Warren’s Invisible War series, based on texts from Romans 7:15-25.*