

*Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, March 23, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.*

## **Title: Set Free from Me (The Invisible War Series Part 2)**

Last Sunday, we launched a new series titled “Invisible War” and explored the first enemy in our spiritual warfare. Whether we realize it or not, according to the Bible, you and I are often our worst enemy in this spiritual battle (Romans 7:15-25). Even the Apostle Paul, one of most well-known biblical scholars in the Christian faith, admitted that he often did not do what God’s law commanded, even though he desired to do so. Instead he found himself doing the very things he hated. When Paul recognized his inner struggle and the sinful nature within him, he cried out to God in the midst of that unseen battle, saying: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death” (Romans 7:24). Paul desperately sought God’s intervention to save him from the power of sin and death. After encountering Jesus Christ as his Savior, Paul was also able to declare that through Christ, who gave him strength (Philippians 4:13), he could do all things—including winning the battle. He praised God, saying, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25).

According to the Bible, there are three enemies in our spiritual warfare: the flesh, the world, and the devil... As we learned last week, our biggest enemy is not Satan or the world. It is you and me. We are often our biggest problem. When we try to escape our struggles by going on vacation, we quickly realize all the internal issues within us travel with us. If we don’t win the battle within, we are left vulnerable to various weapons of self-destruction. Paul listed some of these harmful consequences we may face in our faith journey: shame, uncontrol thoughts, compulsions, fear, hopelessness, bitterness, and insecurity.

Before we look at today’s main scripture, I want to address one of the common destroyers of our faith journey: hopelessness. Hopelessness is often the result of self-destructive thoughts and behaviours. When we feel hopeless about certain areas of life, we may be tempted to give up. If we or our loved ones struggle with spiritual bondage or harmful habit, we may begin to feel hopeless about our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, as well as about our relationships, financial situations, careers, or the care of those we love. Hopelessness is a self-destructive weapon that we use against ourselves. When we allow it to stay in our hearts, it robs us of the joy and hope that God has for our lives. It can lead to depression and discouragement.

This morning, I want us to explore our main text and look at three methods for overcoming the weapons of self-destruction.

The first method you and I can use to be set free from ourselves is this: we must remind ourselves daily of what Jesus did for us. This is the starting point. We need to remember every day what God has done for us through Christ. Paul says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2). The word, “condemnation” in this scripture can be replaced with the list of the self-destructive consequences I mentioned earlier. There is now no shame, uncontrol thoughts, compulsions,

fear, hopelessness, bitterness, or insecurity for those who belong to Jesus Christ. Today, there is hope for those of us who trust in what Jesus has done for us.

Let us focus on the phrase, “No condemnation.” This means God does not judge us for all the wrong we have done if we have repented of our sins and placed our trust in Christ. He does not need to judge or condemn us because Jesus was judged on the cross. Jesus took all that condemnation on our behalf. When Jesus died on the cross. He not only paid for all the sins you and I committed in the past, but He also paid for the sins we will commit in the future. All the wrongdoings we did yesterday, the ones we are doing today, and those we will do tomorrow have already been atoned for. Because there is no condemnation in Christ, there is no reason for us, as Christians, to walk around in shame. This is wonderful news we can only have through Jesus.

Once again, we need to pay attention to what Paul cried out. He asked, “Who will rescue me, a wretched man, from this body that is subject to death” (Romans 7:24). The first method of being set free that Paul sought was not through programs or regulations, but through a person. Please don’t misunderstand me: All these things—programs, regulations, structures—are necessary for us to have self-control and order in our lives. However, as beneficial as these things are, they cannot change us from the inside out. When we are alone or in private—we are not associated with any programs or regulations—we can lose control and be deceived. But when we accept Jesus as our Savior, whose name means “God saves,” we are renewed by the power of His amazing love, demonstrated on the cross. Only Jesus, the Son of God, who became human as a baby, was tempted in every way, understood us, and sympathized with us, can transform us into a new creation.

In the same chapter of our main text, the Apostle Paul declares this amazing love in the following verse: “He [God] who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life— is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... Nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:32-39).

What wonderful promises of God to those who have repentant and sincere hearts toward Christ! No one can condemn us. According to the Word of God, even we ourselves are not allowed to put ourselves down, because God loved us so much that He sacrificed the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, for us. Whenever we feel attacked by the evil spirits of shame and hopelessness, we need to remind ourselves of what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The second method you and I can use to be set free from ourselves is this: we must ask the Holy Spirit to give us better thoughts. This should be a prioritized prayer in our ongoing spiritual battles. Paul says, “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:5-6).

Paul previously mentioned 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 constantly fighting each other in our spiritual hearts. In this scripture, Paul also mentions two kinds of mindsets. There is the mindset of our old nature, which is self-centered and related to you and me. As we have learned, in Romans chapter 7, the first person pronouns like “I,” “my,” “mine,” and “me” are repeated over 40 times. Paul tried to use his own willpower to overcome the spiritual bondage inside of him; however, most of the time, he found that his sinful nature won the battle over his good intentions. That is the mindset of our sinful nature.

Then, there is the mindset of the Holy Spirit. Paul recognized that in Christ, there was the power of the Holy Spirit given to him. In Romans chapter 8, the term “the Spirit” is repeated more than 20 times. There is another power available to us through God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit. After encountering Jesus Christ, Paul started relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and desired to be governed by the Spirit, instead of trying to control himself through his own willpower. In Christ or through Christ, we have a new power—one greater than our own willpower. We need to choose between these two mindsets.

Friends, are we set going to set our minds on the way we naturally think about our lives, or are we going to set our minds on the way the Holy Spirit thinks about our lives? There is a big difference between choosing these mindsets. One mindset leads to self-destruction, which is related to the influence of death, while the other leads to “life and peace,” which is associated with the influence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:6). That is why Paul encourages us in another epistle, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-17,25). Paul uses the verbs “walk” and “keep in step” to describe our daily activities. In other words, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us is not a one-time special event but an ongoing, sacred activity. By doing this, we allow Christ’s divine power to strengthen us in the good fight of faith. As we walk with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit will guide us and give us the power to overcome sinful desires.

Consider the Apostle Paul, the author of today’s epistle. Imagine how strong his mindset or his willpower must have been. Despite his deep spiritual discipline, Paul struggled with his old mindset and cried out to God because he often felt defeated. After learning that the power of the Holy Spirit was stronger than his own willpower, he invited the Spirit to give him sacred desires in his mind 24/7. He wanted to replace all his sinful and selfish nature with God’s divine and holy longings, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

To illustrate this, let me share one of my favorite analogies about two cups of water. Both cups are filled with dirty water that has been mixed with a little black paint. The question is, “How can we turn this dirty water into clean water?” ...The lesson we learn from this experiment is “the principle of replacement.”

Do you know one of the main strategies Satan uses against us today? He bombards our minds with ungodly things through media. Think about it, from the moment we wake up until we go to

bed, we encounter things through what we read, hear, and watch. If we don't guard our hearts against these evil influences, we open ourselves to temptation. Without asking God to control our thoughts, we might be led to do things He does not want us to do. We must replace the lies in our minds with the truth. Instead filling our minds with junk, we need to renew our thoughts with the Word of God. This can be done through reading Scripture, spending time in prayer, cultivating holy desires for God's righteousness, and practicing love for God and our neighbors in our daily walk with Him. These are the activities that will help us build strong, godly patterns in our lives.

There is a famous saying: "Rome was not built in a day." Similarly, breaking old, bad habits does not happen overnight. For most of us, the process of cleaning our hearts will take time and persistence. Some of you may struggle with our shortcomings for so long that you feel, "Real change is impossible for me." I understand how you feel. But in Christ, change is possible for all of us. With diligent effort, pouring the living water of God's Word into our hearts, we can experience transformation from the inside out. God is faithful, and He will help us overcome.

The three method you and I can use to be set free from ourselves is this: we must turn our thoughts to God whenever we are afraid. Paul says, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs –heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8:14-17). Declaring to ourselves, "I am a child of God," when we feel fear or hopeless about our challenges is the antidote to the weapons of self-destruction. Instead of focusing on our fearful and hopeless situations, we must focus on our Mighty and Merciful God—our Heavenly Father.

Whenever we are afraid, the first thing we need to do is remember this— whose family are we a part of? You and I are children of God. We are part of the family of the Everlasting Father in Heaven. With this family comes protection... When we begin to feel afraid, we need to seek our Heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe. We need to remind ourselves of who we are and whom we belong to. We are children of God, and we are in His family! We don't have to worry because God will take of us.

What are we most afraid of? Perhaps the number one fear we experience is "the fear of being out of control." When we feel our lives slipping out of control, it creates tremendous fear. Many of us struggle with the inability to control certain aspects of our lives—our thoughts, words, and behaviours. We may be unable to control habits related to drinking, eating, spending, speaking, or acting. These are often linked to addictions or compulsions.

I've shared before about my mother's ongoing health challenges... Whenever I feel overwhelmed by fear, I often recite the Word of God. One verse I have found to be especially relevant today is from 2 Timothy 1:7: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." One of the benefits of having the Holy Spirit is receiving the power God has promised each of us, including the power of self-control.

Sometimes we misunderstand what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Some people may think that being filled with the Holy Spirit means losing control of ourselves. In fact, the opposite is true. The more we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, the more self-control we will have. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

From my own experiences, I have learned that when I am filled with the Spirit, I am more guided by the Spirit, and I am able to do the things God desires for me. My life is more orderly, and my faith journey produces more fruitful results.

To conclude, let us summarize what we have learned today. Firstly, we need to be thankful to Christ because, in Him, there is no condemnation. If we still feel ashamed, we must remind ourselves of what He did for us on the cross. Secondly, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and renew our minds. We need to replace our old, sinful mindset with the mindset of Christ, relying on the Holy Spirit, not just our own willpower. We must think about “whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable” (Philippians 4:8). Thirdly, we need to turn our thoughts to God when we are afraid. We need to remember who we are, whom we belong to, and who God is. We should say to God honestly and humbly, “Father, I am afraid. Please help me to control my life, knowing that You are in control of everything.” And our Heavenly Father will give us the fruit of the Holy Spirit—self-control—to defeat the weapons of self-destruction and praise God for the victory in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

*\*In preparing this sermon, I was inspired by Rick Warren’s “Invisible War” series, based on texts from Romans 8:1-17.*