

Romans 7:15-25a
7th Sunday after Pentecost
July 31st, 2011
Pastor Joel T. Sauer
Year A

What's Wrong with Me!?!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I hate it. I hate sin. I hate it because I know how it offends God, how it is opposite to everything He is. But day after day, I fall to one temptation and then feel enormous guilt over sinning – I know it's wrong. I get frustrated at how much I sin. What is wrong with me! I don't want to sin, but keep finding myself sinning!

Each of us here knows exactly what I'm talking about, right? Each of here knows the frustration that builds up within us as we try to curb our sinful actions, tame our tongues, quiet those sinful thoughts. We promise that we'll never again fall to a certain temptation and then what happens – we do.

So what's wrong with us? In the lesson before us this morning from chapter 7 of the letter to the Romans, St. Paul knows just how we feel. He knows the cause and, by God's grace, he knows the cure. And that is what we want to discuss this morning as we delve into the lesson before us. Let's go to our lesson.

It has happened time and again in households everywhere, probably even in your own home. Mom bakes cookies and puts them in a cookie jar. Family is coming over and so she says to her child – “Don't eat any of the cookies! I mean it – I want to save some for later.”

What happens? As the day wear on, the little boy just can't stop thinking of eating a cookie. He starts thinking that Mom is pretty mean to keep him from eating a cookie and even thinks – “Mom won't notice just one missing.” And even though Mom said he couldn't have one – the little thief sneaks into the kitchen and snatches a cookie.

Now why did the child do that! It doesn't make sense, does it! He knew that he would be “dead-meat” if he was caught. He doesn't want to disobey Mom. So why did he do it?

Think of it in your life. You know God's commands. You know right from wrong. For example, God commands us not to murder – and that includes holding grudges and harboring angry thoughts toward another, but what happens? Excuses. “But God – look at what that person has done to me. I have a right to be angry.” God commands us to love Him above all things and what happens? Rationalization. “But God, I have to work. I have to get some things done on the house, so I'll make time to study Your Word later.” But later never comes – does it?

Why do we do this? We want to serve God, want to obey His will. We want to stop making excuses and feeble rationalizations. We want to live for God. Why do we continue sinning when we know it is wrong?

St. Paul puts it this way – **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”** Who of us can't empathize with St. Paul? We've been there. We know the struggle. Why do we struggle so much?

Before faith, you and I were nothing but a person controlled by our sinful nature – wanting to sin and loving it! Our sinful nature was like a puppet master – telling us to do this and we did it gladly, enthusiastically. But when faith was worked in our hearts, things changed.

Have you ever bought new clothes and felt like new person? In a similar way, when God brought you to faith, you became a new person. You were covered with the clothes of Jesus. Covered with these divine clothes, God sees you as you are in Jesus – holy and blameless. But God not only changed you outwardly, but inwardly. The Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart so that you now walk in step with God – saying no to sin, hating sin, living for God and doing what is right in His sight. You're a new person.

So what's wrong with us? It can't be the new person that God has made us. That's not the problem. Then why is it that **“what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”**

Maybe it's God's commands? After all if Mom didn't tell her boy that he couldn't eat a cookie, he wouldn't have been so consumed with eating one! But look at what St. Paul says in verse 16. He agrees that God's commands are good. The fault doesn't lie with God or His commands. So what's the answer? If it isn't the new person God has made us by faith in Jesus and it isn't God's commands - why do you and I still do those things which we **“do not want to do”**? What's wrong with us!?!

Look at verse 17. Paul gives the answer. Why do I still sin when I am a new person in Jesus? Because **“it is sin living in me.”** That is why you and I still sin – because of our sinful nature. It wants to control us, it wants to overwhelm us – it does everything our new person doesn't want us to do.

You remember those old cartoons and pictures which showed an angel on one shoulder and a little devil on the other constantly battling each other – one trying to get the person to do wrong, the other to do the right thing? That's kind of what is going on. We are a new person in Christ, but there is another who is within us – the sinful nature who wants nothing to do with God and His will.

Has this ever happened to you? You want to focus on what is happening in church, but you find yourself drifting off during the sermon, thinking of eating at Whataburger later or focusing on how hot or cold it is in here. You don't want to, but you find yourself distracted.

In a small way, that is the battle going on within us, a war. The battles may be big, they may be small. It may be a little skirmish – such as being distracted in church. It may be a larger battle – when we are battling daily with anger, with lust, with the profane words that come from our mouths. It may be an all out assault – dealing with alcoholism, with addiction, with sins that we would never want anyone else to know. It's a war!

So if it is sinful nature living in us that's sinning – then we are off the hook, right? Not at all. We're still held responsible for our sin. We can't excuse it by saying “I can't help that I drink too much. I can't help it I have a raging temper. I can't help it that I spread gossip. I can't help it that I'm always complaining.” So what is wrong with me!?!?!

“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me”, Paul says. Do you see a way out yet? Do you see how utterly corrupt and evil our sinful nature is? It can do no good, nothing but evil. We know it, we experience it – and we can't help but to shout with Paul – **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”**

Who indeed! How can we ever have rest when there is such a huge war being waged within us? How can we have peace in this great struggle day after day?

“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Here is the rest we need, rest from the struggle – Jesus Christ our Lord! Think of it - the Son of God came down from heaven, took

on flesh to become one of us – yet without sin. Though without sin, He became the greatest sinner of all, because He took upon Himself your sin, my sin, the sin of the world. He smothered Himself with our despicable, damnable sin and suffered its punishment at the cross. He covered Himself with our wretchedness, so that by faith we may be covered with His righteousness, His holiness, His perfection. But Jesus did not stay covered with sin on the cross and dead in the grave, He rose victoriously – showing His power over sin, death and the devil. That is the victory that is now yours and mine by faith! Your salvation depends not on how many battles you win in the war within – but it depends on the victory won by your Savior – Jesus Christ!

Now think about what this means for your daily life, about what Christ means for you. By faith in Christ, you are a perfect person. You died with Christ and rose with Him. Your sinful nature was crucified with Him and you are living a life that is dead to sin and alive to God.

See yourself as God sees you in Christ - forgiven, a new person, free from being controlled by the puppet master of sin. How can I change? In Christ, you already have. How can I better follow God's will? In Christ you already are! See yourself in Christ and what He has done for you, what He makes you through baptism!

Do you know why in some services or sermons the pastor begins with the sign of the cross and says, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? It is a reminder of our baptism, when the sign of the cross was placed on our head and on our heart. It is a reminder that you and I are baptized. Not that we *were* baptized, but that we *are* baptized and continue to live our baptism. Each day is reliving of our baptism as we fight that sinful nature inside of us – taking it by the throat, drowning, killing it with repentance. Each day is a reliving of our baptism as we rise up with Christ, a new person connected to Him by faith! That is why Martin Luther wrote in his small catechism– "In the morning when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father, Son (+), and Holy Spirit. Amen." Remember that you *are* baptized!

When temptations come, when you see sin in your life, then run, run to the cross daily to see your victory in Christ. Flee, flee to His Word, His sacraments and receive the spoils of that victory – forgiveness, life and salvation. When you are battle-weary day after day, hear Your Savior's words – "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" (Matt. 11:28) Refreshed with Christ and bolstered with His forgiveness, return, yes return then to the battlefield and to wage war against your sinful nature remembering who you are in Christ.

Will this battle, the war within us ever end? Oh, yes as certain as Jesus rose from the dead! This battle will end in victory when Jesus carries you home to heaven. Because of the cross, the empty tomb, the victory of Jesus – the sinful nature doesn't stand a chance! And so we fight, we battle, we wage war. We fight against it with Christ – no other weapon will suffice. No - only the weapon of Christ into whom you are baptized and in whom you have forgiveness, life and salvation.

Oh, dear Christian – see your sinful nature for what it is – horrible, evil, despicable. But see the cure; remember that you are baptized into Christ – a new person, God's child, forgiven, possessing heaven itself. With that in mind, continue to fight knowing that in Christ the final victory is yours!

In the name of Jesus!

Amen.