

Fight! Winning the Internal Conflict

Part 1: Are we Taking it Seriously?

(preached 10/6/24)

We're fighting a lot in 2020's America: mainly with each other.

- We divide over global issues like Ukraine & Israel.
- We argue over national issues and take sides in politics: conservative vs. progressive, etc.
- We even hear foolish murmurings and predictions of “Civil War.”
- We fight in our marriages, families, at work, and at church.
- Once in awhile we hear a sermon that we fight with fallen angels and demons, and perhaps direct our “Sword of the Spirit” prayers at them.

What if the biggest battle isn't with Satan, our spouses, or the opposing political party?

What if it's inside of us?

What if the combatants are the various parts of ourselves, each warring and competing with each other to get their needs met?

- What if we're not taking this internal conflict seriously, but have our heads in the sand?
- Do we even know WHO the “combatants” are?
- How to fight and win?

The Lord has equipped us to REIGN not just over the devil, but over ourselves. Today's sermon encourages us 1) to take the fight seriously and 2) awaken to what God has given us to win it.

STORY. A few years back I told you all a story of the *first TKD tournament* I participated in when I was 18. Long story short: I thought I was the next Bruce Lee and expected to dominate, but I lost without even placing! In the sparring competition I actually fell down just by tripping over my own foot. I still recall the look of surprise on my opponent's face when he realized he hadn't touched me, yet there I was on my back on the mat.

It was such a major blow to my confidence that I soured—internally—toward competition and became horribly **afraid** every time one came around. My instructor insisted that if we ever wanted to advance in belt rank and eventually get to black, we needed to participate in tournaments...so I went. Yet here is what I would do: **I would sabotage myself on the inside first, then the outside.**

I stepped into the ring with an attitude that I needed to **throw the match**, get it over with, and get out. Even though I was nervous to the point of shaking it was as if I had no energy, would only go through the motions, and lose. People would make comments telling me I looked lethargic, wasn't trying, asked if I was sick, etc. I told myself things I didn't believe like "*I'm not in this to win, but to gain experience*" or "*It's not about a trophy, but participation.*" This went on for years until I was in my early 20's.

By then I was a black belt and *another tournament came around*. I had the same attitude as before, intending to go in, throw the match, telling myself a bunch of lies before and after. I still remember entering the ring that year and was matched up with a guy I didn't like—he and I were like oil and water. That wasn't enough to motivate me, though. We took up our stances and the match began.

We were required to wear **PROTECTIVE GEAR** that latched with Velcro and the problem was with contact it would come loose or off. Thus there was an unspoken protocol that if one of the combatants gear came loose/off the match was paused while he tightened it. About halfway into the match my footgear got loose and was flopping around, so I signaled to the ref for a pause. I got down on one knee to tighten my gear...and my opponent (the one I couldn't stand!) **tried to kick me in the head.**

Something instantly transformed in my that moment, inspiring a 180 degree shift that was permanent: **I started taking tournaments seriously.** My opponent wasn't evil, but he wanted to win. He wasn't like me who had kept his head in the sand, laid low, turned a blind eye to my internal issues, and self-sabotaging. He wanted the trophy and was going for it!

For the first time in awhile **I realized was real risk in these competitions.** Risk of bodily injury that could have sent me to the ER. Risk of my insecurities being even worse than before, risk of living with both for the rest of my life.

At this point I had years of training and technique in the art on how to attack and defend. I'd poured lots of time and money into this training, but for what? Just to walk into competitions with a negative attitude, throw the match, and get out?

I understood in that few seconds I'd been doing the same thing with **my internal sparring match.**

Allowing certain parts of me to reign over the rest of me taking away my joy, my peace, and telling me I should live in fear.

AS I KNELT THERE FIXING MY GEAR everything happened fast: I saw my opponent surge forward and throw the kick, and by God's grace my training kicked in and I blocked it from caving my head in. The ref immediately intervened and backed him off, then asked if I was ok. I was more than ok...a calm yet *hyper-invigorated sense of purpose* had totally replaced my sick-to-my-stomach fear that had plagued me for years.

I told the ref to continue the match and he did: I was a completely different person. I dove forward with both barrels blazing and my heart, mind, and body were one...all 3 acting in unison and resonance. Unbeknownst to me, my instructor was watching the match and after he said *"something happened to you. I haven't seen you fight that hard in years and it's about time you started living up to the potential I've always seen in you."* I ended up winning for the first time since I was 18.

Previous to that day, all I saw was being unable to win, a loser, when in fact **my training had fully equipped me to overcome.**

Is it the same with us in our Christian walk? We read our Bibles, listen to sermons, talk theology with each other, pray and receive wisdom and revelation...yet despite all this are we winning the internal fight?

- Are we even acknowledging it's there?
- Are we really taking it seriously and fighting it?
- Or have we decided to throw the match when it comes around because we've taken losses and felt ashamed?
- Or have we come to a cynical acceptance that we'll just never change?

I submit that perhaps we're engaging in other fights we think we can win and naming our enemies accordingly: the deep state, the liberals, the conservatives, other Christians we disagree with, a political party, etc. We're swinging the sword there, when maybe we should stop ignoring the conflict within ourselves. *Perhaps the Sword of the Spirit is needed in the battle between our hearts, minds, and bodies.*

[Rom 7:21-23 NKJV] 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.

The "members" are the different parts of us and what Paul reveals is what we already know through experience: *they conflict with each other!*

[Gal 5:17 ESV] 17 For the desires of the flesh are **against** the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are **against** the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Paul tells the Galatians the same as he did the Romans: *there are at least two parts of us which are at WAR with each other* and please note something important: it's the DESIRES of the Spirit which are opposed to the DESIRES of the flesh.

Now that we're born again, **we WANT to obey God both within and without**. We want to be holy and not sin. We want to openly talk about Jesus instead of being silent. We want to read the Bible, go to Church, and pray.

Each of our parts want something different and what they want is in OPPOSITION to each other. If you're married you understand this well! Aren't there times when married couples argue and fight because our desires clash with each other? If you have more than 1 kid, you've experienced this many times when they fight with each other AND you, *all of whom are trying to get what they want including the parent.*

Two questions: **1) is your spouse evil?** When their desires oppose yours? 2) **Are you kids evil?** When their desires oppose each other and yours? The answer is NO to both. More on that later.

[Eph 2:3 ESV] 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

I've already preached an entire *sermon series about the heart*, what it desires, and it can lead to trouble...so have no need to repeat that today.

I have 3 sons and now imagine they're all here at church and start fighting with each other. All 3 of them are loud like their dad, so imagine if they were sitting in the pews arguing loudly. Things get so heated they actually start hitting each other! Suppose you're witnessing this happen and bring it to my attention...but I just shrug my shoulders and say "yeah, they're like that." As their dad, should I take their fight seriously enough to intervene? Attempt to resolve it?

What if I ignored them after you brought it up to me and then started ranting to you about the opposing political party and how I posted something on SM calling them out? And was proud of myself for “fighting the good fight”? All the while my 3 sons are in the pews beating on each other?

IT'S TIME TO TURN THE SWORD OF GOD'S SPIRIT TO DEAL WITH THE INTERNAL COMBATANTS WHO ARE HITTING EACH OTHER INSIDE OF US.

[2Ti 2:3-4 NKJV] 3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good **soldier** of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of [this] life, that he may please him who **enlisted him as a soldier**.

What pleases God? Faith...which is a fruit generated WITHIN us by the Holy Spirit. *Can strong faith live in a person constantly at war with themselves?*

Let's identify all the “combatants”:

- The body/flesh.
- The mind which produces thoughts.
- The heart which produces emotions.
- The spirit/inner man—one with the Holy Spirit.

I put these in particular order: from the “outward” most part of us—the body—to the most inward “core” part of us—our spirit.

- Each of these has their own desires and goals.
- Each believes their desires and goals to be “good” even if they aren't.

First let's reveal the BRILLIANCE of the work Jesus did in us when we got Saved. After the Fall of Adam, *ALL parts of us were cut off from God and became corrupted*. After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ we were BORN AGAIN and made in the likeness of Jesus. Please remember what Jesus promised over and over: EVERLASTING life. Everlasting means forever and let's consider what that means for us.

If we had a pair of shoes that lasted forever, they would be untouched and uncorrupted by aging, time, and damage. *Christ did this with our spirit which is now made from the “stuff” of Heaven*. When Adam rebelled, all physical matter was corrupted out to the end of the universe...**but Heaven remained untouched**. Pure, eternal, undefiled. No sin, evil, or death can enter there.

Jesus resurrected our spirits and remade them from the same stuff...which is the only reason God the Holy Spirit can dwell there. God will only live in a place completely consecrated holy. The “old man” that Paul says was crucified and died was our old spirit self, and the “new man/creation” is the born-again spirit. Our spirit is ONE with the Holy Spirit and Lord set our spirit apart from the rest of us so that it could not be corrupted:

[Heb 4:12 NKJV] 12 For the word of God [is] living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to **the division of soul and spirit**, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The “soul” is our heart and mind. Our spirit is our new self, our Christ self we read about in the NT scriptures. Our spirit is our “born again” part remade in the exact likeness of Jesus. Its desires match those and follow the Holy Spirit and *cannot be corrupted by sin*.

It’s not only eternal in its life, but in its righteousness and holiness. Even though it lives contained in our bodies, it’s not corruptible by sin, the devil, or any of the desires of the body, heart, or mind. Within us, *it’s enthroned at the right hand of Jesus*. It’s the part of us which will ascend to heaven when our body expires.

Our bodies, hearts, and minds will inherit the same eternity at the Resurrection but until then still suffer with sinful desires and are mortal.

NEXT WEEK I’ll get into details of how we can begin to *resolve our internal conflicts*, but I want to spend the rest of today’s sermon on the truth that **GOD HAS ALREADY GIVEN US THE ABILITY TO DO SO**. I really like the word “reign” when it’s applied to the church.

The word “reign” translates this way: *“to be a king, to exercise the power of a king, the rule of the Messiah.”*

Let’s consider this and apply it: **a king has authority over both subjects and enemies and not all enemies are evil.** Our spouse, kids, family, co-workers, and fellow Christians may be in conflict with us & each other because our desires oppose one another. Whereas Satan is evil all the above are not. *Each wants what they think is best and good...even if it isn’t.*

“We” must reign as kings over our inward parts, yes...but our parts aren’t evil even if their desires are. More on that next week.

- For now, “we’ve” ALREADY been seated on the throne to reign.
- “We’ve” been given authority over ourselves to resolve internal conflicts by Jesus Himself.

[Eph 2:4-6 YLT] 4 and God, being rich in kindness, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even being dead in the trespasses, did make us to live together with the Christ, (by grace ye are having been saved,) 6 and did raise [us] up together, and **did seat [us] together in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus,**

I used YLT because Young emphasized tenses: past, present, and future. If you notice, **being seated with Christ in heavenly places isn’t just future tense: it’s past and present.** Our western minds struggle with this because we thought that only happens after we die, when our spirit ascends to heaven to be with Jesus. Yet we’ve already learned in past sermons that *God brought Heaven to earth in our own bodies*—we were His intended Temple from the beginning.

When we were born again, we were dedicated to Jesus and His Spirit came to live here within us—***seated on a throne inside us*** (the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the NC). Then our spirits were regenerated and **seated at the right hand of Jesus within us**...remembering that part of the **“heavenly places” are inside us** because God mimicked His “living room” there.

- Our spirit has been seated within us as a king.
- Our spirit has been enthroned inside us to reign.

Our problem is that our other parts are trying to play “the Game of Thrones” and unseat him.

And thus internal conflict arises. The war within.

OUR HEARTS, BODIES, AND MINDS ARE FIGHTING EACH OTHER AND OUR KINGLY SPIRIT.

Paul goes to GREAT lengths explaining this conflict in the Book of Romans, **showing us that death and sin reigned—was king and in authority—from Adam to Jesus**. Think of them like King and Queen.

Then our Lord and Savior dethroned both, placed them under His feet, and sat down on the throne to rule supreme and forever.

When reading through the Bible, you'll see the reference "*enemies under the feet*" and "*enemies are (used as) a footstool*." What does this mean?

When a king defeated another king, the defeated king was brought in chains and forced to get on all fours before the victorious king. The VK was seated on his throne of power AND had a TV tray in front of him including a goblet of fine wine. The defeated king was brought forward and forced to get on all fours in front of the TV tray and the VK would then rest his feet on the back or head of the defeated king...while he sipped from his goblet of wine. All the VK's subjects would cheer, clap, and throw a big celebration.

Father did this for Jesus which is why we read verses where Jesus "crushes" the head of the serpent. Well intending artists having Jesus standing up straight and stomping on a snake's head but a more accurate version is Jesus sitting on His throne resting His heels on the back of Satan's head, who is on all fours in front of Him.

What does David tell us God did for him, and us? Prepares a "table" (TV tray) in the presence of ENEMIES, anoints head with oil (for kings only) and cup runneth over (goblet of victory wine to be sipped.)

[Rom 5:17 YLT] 17 for if by the offence of the one [Adam] the death did reign through the one [Adam], much more those, who the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness are receiving, **in life shall reign** through the one -- Jesus Christ.

- Only kings reign, and only kings sit on thrones.
- Kingmaker Jesus is the One Who put **us** there.

Jesus once said He overcame the world. His beloved disciple John then said this:

[1Jo 5:4 ESV] 4 **For everyone who has been born [again] of God overcomes the world.** And this is the **victory** that has overcome the world--**our faith**.

We've been regenerated.

- We've been seated on a throne.
- We've been given authority.
- We've been given a kingly Sword of the Spirit.
- It's time to take the internal fight seriously...and win.